

Stop Doubting and Believe

Sermon, April 8, 2018

A week ago we heard from the gospel that the Lord's disciples were shocked and deeply depressed after witnessing how Jesus Christ was tortured and crucified. They were hiding in a secret place where the doors were locked. Probably they remembered what Jesus once said to them: "If the world hates me, they will hate you, too." The fear that they might be persecuted made them stay together and hide at a secret place where the doors were locked.

Three days after the crucifixion, Mary, who met Jesus at the empty tomb, went to see the disciples and shared the good news with them. However, they could not believe it. Being still under the shock, they did not remember what Jesus said to them before about his resurrection.

Today we heard the good news that the Resurrected Lord visited his disciples in person. In the Presence of His life, he gave them Peace and Pardon. Jesus always knows exactly where we are and how we feel. The resurrected Lord, even today, is with us and wants to help those

- who are sad, troubled, hopeless, and cry,
- who are almost crashing under their crosses; and
- who need advice and counselling.

Today we are focusing on Thomas.

Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of the first Easter. We do not know why he was not there. However, because he was not in the right place at the right time, his faith got in crisis. We used to call him "doubting THOMAS," but we should not forget that he was the first disciple, who called Jesus "MY Lord and MY God." After Pentecost, Thomas went to India to share the good news about His Lord, He died in India as a martyr FOR his Lord.

Now let us see in three steps

1. How many obstacles were in Thomas' life that caused him to come to a stronger faith?
2. What happened with Thomas? Was he not in the right place at the right time?
3. How does the Lord transform his wounded disciple?

Translating Thomas' story to the present, let's learn about:

1. The challenges in OUR lives which do not let us come to a stronger and living faith.

2. The importance to be in the right place at the right time.
3. How can the Lord transform his people's lives today?

1. The obstacles in Thomas life to come to a living faith

After Jesus appeared to the disciples, they went to Thomas and told him what had happened, because they cared about Thomas. However, Thomas' response was not encouraging at all. He said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:25)

In the original Greek text, there is a double negative, which means *I absolutely will not believe it.*

Thomas thought he knew many things about Jesus, but here we find out that he did not know Jesus very well.

Thomas had been listening to Jesus for three years, but it seems that he still did not understand His words. Thomas was very close to Jesus, but it seems he did not have a personal connection with the Saviour. Thomas could not remember what Jesus told them, that He had to die, but He would be resurrected.

It seems that Thomas was an analytical person by nature. When Jesus was talking about his departure, and none of the disciples understood it, it was Thomas, spoke up and said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5)

According to John 11, Thomas was melancholy as well. Probably this is why he was hiding somewhere by himself. Maybe he thought that if Jesus died, he is not a disciple anymore and there would be no reason to be with the disciples.

When the eleven were telling him that they met Jesus and Jesus is alive, Thomas could not believe them. Analyzing the answer he gave to the disciples, that he cannot believe - ONLY if he can touch the holes in Jesus' hand and His side - I think he was in emotional pain. The trauma of Jesus' death hurt him deeply. At this point, he had only heartache and disappointment.

Have you ever been so hurt or disappointed that it was hard to believe anything?

More than 20 years ago I was witnessing one of my very faithful and devoted colleague's challenge when his faith was almost falling to pieces. His 35-year-old wife was leading a youth camp for a week. When driving home with her four children, a car accident occurred. The minister's wife and three of their children died on the scene. The fourth child survived following surgery. The minister was on his knees for two days in front of the four caskets. He was not able to accept any words of comfort from anyone.

There was a born-again custodian in that congregation who, shortly before the funeral service, went on his knees next to his minister and asked him a question: “Do you love your Lord Jesus more than them?” This question was very similar to the question that Jesus asked of John after the resurrection. The minister, after facing this question, stood up, and said: “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.”

Locked doors are not the real obstacles for Jesus, but the locked hearts.

I assume that you know a lot about Jesus Christ. You have been listening to His message for years, you pray, you worship him ... But let me ask you kindly, do you know exactly who He is? It is not enough to know that He is a living God, but we have to know he wants a personal relationship with his people.

- Do you take His words 100% seriously?
- Do you believe in everything what He says?
- Or are you debating what you want to believe and what you omit from his words.
- Do you have a personal connection with him?

We all know that, often, the pain and suffering can damage our faith and we need time to recover. Under pressure, sometimes we do not know what to pray or how to pray. When we are looking to our problems, they seem to be HUGE like a mountain and the Lord seems to be small compared to our issues. When somebody tries to put us and our faith together, we are not ready right away to listen to them.

I have asked you many times since I am here at Calvin as your minister, but let me ask you again this very important question: Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? If not, then what are the obstacles in your life that prevent you from having a living relationship with Jesus?

- Why can't you believe everything that Jesus is saying to you?
- Do you have any disappointments, any doubts, any fears or any questions?

Come to Him now and talk to him about these obstacles and He can help you create a new heart. He can give you a strong and unbreakable faith.

2. Be in the right place at the right time

Because Thomas was not together with his brothers on Easter day, he missed the great opportunity to see Jesus and to get his Peace and Pardon. He could not believe what the disciples said about Jesus. One word kept his mind busy: PROOF.

However, on Easter morning, they could not believe either what Mary said to them. Thomas had witnessed that Jesus raised Lazarus and the 12-year-old child, but could not believe that Jesus was resurrected.

In the presence of the Lord, the disciples received Peace and Pardon, but Thomas continued to fight with the word PROOF. For this reason the differences between the disciples and Thomas was significant.

- The disciples were rejoicing – Thomas was mourning.
- The disciples were happy – Thomas was sad.
- The disciples were comforted – Thomas was inconsolable.
- The disciples had faith in resurrection – Thomas had the fear of death.
- The disciples saw a new way after their death – Thomas did not see anything after death.
- For the disciples, death was the beginning of a new and happy life – for Thomas, death was the last station in his life.

This is how Thomas spent a week. He was analytical. He could believe only what he saw.

When God created the cosmos there were no witnesses, but we see what he created, the result of His creation. There is an invisible hydropower which is moving things. We don't see the hydro but we can see what this energy can make.

I was asking myself: Why did the Lord wait eight more days until He healed Thomas's faith? Jesus, the best psychotherapist, knew that Thomas needed time. During that week Jesus was teaching him a few things:

- If you are not in your place, you can miss things.
- If you are not at the worship service where people are gathering, you will miss My gifts.
- If you might fall into a deep ditch, it might be difficult to come out.
- If you miss an opportunity to meet Jesus, to talk to him, that opportunity may not come back again.
- If you are not on your knees in prayer, then how can I give you what you are asking for?
- If you don't have quiet time with Me, then how can you hear My voice?

3. There are no obstacles to receiving grace from Jesus.

We can make God's work more difficult, we can push Him away for a while but, with His everlasting and endless love, He can reach us and can change us and all those for whom we pray.

After 8 days, Jesus visited his disciples again. Thomas was there, too. Jesus took the effort to heal Thomas. At this point, Jesus quoted Thomas word by word exactly what he said 8 days before to the disciples. How did Jesus know what Thomas said before? Was Jesus there when the disciples met him? They did not see Jesus around them. Then, how is it possible that Jesus can quote Thomas in his

doubts? Because He was there in an invisible way. He promised: “I am with you all the days to the very end of the ages.”

Jesus extended his hand towards Thomas, saying: “Thomas come. Come and see.”

He invited Thomas to do exactly what he said: “Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it in My side.” Stop doubting! BELIEVE!

You, too, my beloved, need to decide to take the Lord at His word and move forward. “Stop doubting and believe”.

The Lord helped Thomas to open his heart for him. Thomas was given the opportunity to experience the risen Christ. He was also able to experience the Pardon and the Peace; a true life changing peace in the presence of the risen Lord.

After Thomas met Jesus, he realized how wrong he was, who he was and who Jesus was.

Now, nobody had to tell him anything about Jesus. He realized that Jesus was not only a teacher, a prophet, and a physician but the King of Kings. Jesus is LORD and GOD. Here, Thomas started a personal connection with Jesus. He was not ashamed to confess that he had doubts but now he was a believer. With this confession a new chapter starts in Thomas’ life. He knew he would never be alone because his resurrected Lord would be with him always and everywhere. He knew now what he had to do in the future as a disciple. He was ready to offer his life and his energy for Jesus service.