

# Christ Church *Sermons*

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Second Sunday of Easter, March 30, 2008

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Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

## Thomas “My Lord and My God”

From the earliest days of my lifetime I have heard the expression “Doubting Thomas” said often and in a way such that the speaker is trying to distance themselves from this failure, this awful person who would have denied that Jesus had been resurrected until such time as he had personal visual and tactile proof of that resurrection. Quite possibly at least one implication of the speaker of these words is that the speaker sees themselves as better than Thomas because after all Jesus did say “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And the speaker must surely be one of those so blessed.

Well, maybe just maybe Thomas is getting the blame for something for which he should not be judged so harshly.

Let’s look at Thomas in different circumstances for a moment

Thomas is the same disciple who spoke up, according to the gospel of John, when facing the prospect of Jesus returning to Jerusalem where the Jews had just taken up stones and tried to stone Jesus, Thomas spoke up with courageous loyalty and said in a leadership way to the other disciples “let us also go, that we may die with him.” This very loyal statement from Thomas could go hand in hand with the tradition of what happened to Thomson beyond the biblical accounts of the early church.

Namely, outside the Bible there is a tradition that Thomas was the apostle who took the good news about Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God to the east so that those living on the subcontinent of India might have “life in his (Jesus) name also.”

There is general agreement among the historians that St. Thomas a Jew himself by birth visited India in search of Jews settled there. The tradition is that he subsequently established seven and a half churches in the southeastern part of India but this is viewed with skepticism by some Western historians. However, the fact remains there is a Christian community in India of 24 million believers according to a 2007 survey. Among those counted are the Keralites who with one other group make up a 60% majority of the total Indian Christian population and it is the Kerlaites who attribute and claim an apostolic origin to their church.

One is left to wonder how did Thomas become the one to go to India. Did they draw straws and Thomas got the short straw? I’m say the short straw because India was and is a long, long way from Jerusalem. Alexander had not reached India in his invasions and conquest of the eastern world, the Roman world did not include India - there is little if any evidence of Greek or Roman language or culture in India at this time. Hinduism had been the religion of the peoples there since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. So I would think that anyone taking the story of Jesus Christ into India in 1<sup>st</sup> century was facing some major obstacles of language, culture, religious beliefs and practices just to mention a few barriers that come to mind immediately. This was no lovely, cushy assignment to Alexandria or Antioch, this was going out into the unknown world of India beyond the support and

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comfort of the Roman world i.e. no roman roads, no protecting soldiers, no support systems, no communities in Jerusalem or Antioch to call upon for help. And yet the tradition holds that Thomas went into these circumstances and established seven or more Christian churches which have survived and grown until today.

So, on the one hand we have Thomas as the courageous loyal one; and on the other hand we have Thomas the faithful messenger of the word to an end of the earth. This does not sound like a skeptic, a doubter. Let's consider again that fateful day of the resurrection from another perspective.

Simon and John return from the burial site to the other disciples and announce that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. Mary Magdalene comes and announces to the disciples "I have seen the Lord" and tells them that he had said this thing to her. According to Mark, They, meaning all the disciples did not believe her. According to Luke also the disciples thought Mary Magdalene's "words seemed like an idle tale and they did not believe her." And then we have the disciples without Thomas gathered in a house behind locked doors and Jesus came and revealed himself to them. Well when Thomas returns, he is still in the non-believing camp which is where all the others were even when Jesus appeared to them. So what does Thomas say? What would we say? He says what I think each one of us would say - I want to see him for myself. I have heard the "idle talk" of Mary Magdalene, earlier this morning now you guys tell me that you have seen him in the evening. I want first hand knowledge. Can't you just see Thomas and perhaps ourselves having just a little bit of that old Missouri challenge that says "show me" Don't tell me any more, just show me - further more show me the wounds also that I may touch them.

And so a week later, again in the house, Thomas and the other disciples are gathered in the house. And suddenly Jesus appears to the disciples including Thomas. Thomas is invited by Jesus to "put your finger here, reach out your hand and put it in my side" at this critical moment of visible proof for Thomas "did Thomas actually reach out and touch the hand of Jesus, did Thomas actually put his hand into the side of Jesus?" Guess what - The gospel account doesn't tell us. What the gospel account does tell us is that Thomas answered Jesus' invitation with an acknowledgement that Jesus is "My Lord and my God!"

Luke tells us that the other disciples were shown his hands and his feet and "while they were in their joy still disbelieving and wondering, Jesus said to them "have you anything to eat here?" How would we have reacted to these supernatural occurrences? Would we have the reassurance of needing to reach out and touch his hand or his side?

We do not know the answer to this question and a similar set of circumstances is not likely to happen to us as happened to Thomas.

But one message coming out of these events seems very clear. Faith now rests on testimony of the apostolic testimony according to the Oxford annotated Bible It is from here and the day of Pentecost that the apostles go forth and spread the good news of God's unbounded love. From here, Thomas went forth deep into India, all the way down to the southeastern tip of India and established churches that survive even until today and the other disciples to the known world. So maybe the question about how we would have reacted in the locked room when Jesus appeared to the disciples is less important than how do we react when WE are called upon to spread the good news of God's love for this world.

Initially the apostles, Thomas and the other disciples and now handed down through the ages we, you and I are in that set of people on whom the spreading of the good news is dependent.

We don't know how Thomas came to be given his choice assignment. We have nothing to tell us how Thomas was chosen for his non-cushy assignment but I can see the same Thomas who said "come let us also go, that we may die with him" taking on the India assignment with an attitude of My lord and My God" said "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you," and that is what I (Thomas) am going to do. Thomas picking up his knapsack, his traveling wrap and spare sandals and headed off on a long, long journey from which he would never return.

And us? What type of assignment does The Lord our God have for each one of us? I don't know the answer to this question either but I would suggest that when you feel a twinge of concern, or compassion or uneasiness or anxiety about something in this old broken world that you just know God would want to change, you may have just been called to be the one to do something about it on behalf of God and to show God's love in that situation. So figuratively speaking pack up your traveling wrap and your spare sandals and get on with what God would have you to do. And enjoy your trip with "your Lord, your God!"

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