

## **JOHN 20:19-29**

Late that Sunday evening when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you!" he said and then showed them his hands and his side. So when the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus repeated, "Peace be with you!" and said, "As the Father sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them, saying "Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive any man's sins, they stand forgiven. If you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain."

One of the Twelve, Thomas, that is the Twin, was not with the rest when Jesus came. So the disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails on his hands, unless I put my finger into the place where the nails were and my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were again in the room, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, saying, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here. See my hands. Reach your finger here and put it into my side. Be unbelieving no longer, but believe." Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said, "Because you have seen me you have found faith.

Happy are they who never saw me and yet have found faith.

## **LET GOD BE GOD**

### **John 20:19-29**

Oh, Thomas. You had the courage to think for yourself, to give voice to your doubt when all the others were being swept away in euphoria following their encounter with their resurrected friend. In our modern vernacular, we can almost hear your response to their excited report: “Prove it!”

But you held fast, giving voice to your skepticism and your demand for more evidence than just their stay-so. And we owe you a debt of gratitude for granting amnesty to all twenty-first century denizens of earth who refuse to swallow testimonies that lack verification.

We do live in a prove-it-to-me society. We are not easily persuaded to change our beliefs—even when the weight of evidence is overwhelmingly tilted toward a contrary point of view. And while that can clearly become an issue of flat-out denial of reality, the doubt that underlies it is actually a strength of human character. It is not only the basis for endurance in adversity, but the primordial goo of scientific discovery and the creation of new ideas.

Doubt is ironically the stepping stone to belief. It seeks evidence which allows us to ford the river of unknowing to the other side where we can firmly place our feet on the bank of conviction. Of course, there is a difference between alleviating doubt objectively through scientific inquiry where you can devise experiments, the results of which can be repeatedly verified; and subjectively where the best you can do is take that leap of faith, we must take on Easter.

Thomas did not have any proof of the resurrection. For whatever reason, he was indisposed when Jesus made his cameo appearance a week earlier during which he demonstrated physical evidence of the crucifixion thereby verifying the resurrection for any of the other disciples who were struggling with their skepticism. If you were Thomas, would you have simply accepted their word for it? Do you accept it today over 2000 years later? I would doubt the sincerity of anyone who tried to assure me they did not at least secretly harbor a measure of skepticism over the resurrection accounts. Jesus anticipated this when he basically told his disciples, "You have it easy. You have been blessed with a direct experience. You have touched me. For you, there is no longer room for doubt. *But blessed are those who believe who have not seen.*" That's us, folks!

Let's delve into the dynamics of doubt a little deeper and see if we can understand it from a different point of view which might give us another way of working with it. Speaking of skepticism, I am doubtful that meeting it head on—you either believe or you don't! —is the best way to approach it. "Take it or leave it" always leaves us caught in a quagmire. Taking a different approach is similar to officiating a sporting event. One of the things you immediately learn as a novice official when you hit the court or field for the first time is that the angle you take on a play dictates how you see it. Standing in one place does not allow you to observe aspects of the play which are critical to getting the call right. You always see officials moving to improve their angle. So let's try to get another angle on doubt.

First, let us acknowledge that skepticism is not something we need to be cured of. What could possibly alleviate any doubt we have about the resurrection? There is nothing. Proof using the scientific process is not relevant. What experiment would you devise to demonstrate its authenticity? Faith by its very nature must include doubt.

Therefore, it is not only okay to doubt; it is inevitable. Anyone who says you must accept the resurrection unquestionably or you're doomed to eternal damnation is lying to both you and to themselves.

Thomas had a direct experience. We don't. But it is the teachings of Christ about how to live that must be the fire that lights our souls. And then we have to just let go and Let God Be God.

So as we struggle with doubt, perhaps like officials we need to take a different approach. Since science isn't going to help us, we must take the spiritual angle which is centered in faith. From that perspective, what evidence do we have that life is renewable and eternal? Isn't it built into the DNA of the universe? Life is being created constantly. For example, just last month, the new Web satellite telescope detected clear evidence of a new planet being formed in our own galaxy. The universe, which is God's physical expression of the spiritual, is continuously evolving and expanding.

Even after the devastation of a wildfire, many of which are already burning in areas of our country, renewal of life is just beneath the ground awaiting rainfall to restore the vegetation. It may take decades, but life has a different time table. After World War II, Berlin was in rubble just as Mariupol is today. But it has been totally restored. And over time, Ukraine will be too. The human spirit is a mirror reflection of the Divine.

And ask yourself this: how many times has God renewed you? Haven't we all had numerous experiences over our life spans when

something totally unexpected came our way to restore us and to pave a new future? How do coincidences happen? By accident? I don't think so. It's been said that coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous.

Yes, a spiritual perspective requires faith, not scientific proof. And it is important that we understand they are different. The evidence of God's faithfulness is all around us. We see it every spring when the flowers, grass and trees burst back to life from their winter slumber. While physical death is inevitable, let it also be noted that new life follows it. We all know that energy can be neither created nor destroyed—only converted. We are spiritual beings in physical bodies. When we breathe our last, we too will acquire a new form. What that is, nobody knows. But faith teaches us that God has a plan and we have to let God Be God. *Happy are those who never saw me and yet have found faith.*

Reverend Thomas Dunlap    May 15, 2022