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# **Thomas: Our Patron Saint**



A Sermon By  
The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell

April 28, 2019  
The Second Sunday of Easter  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Acts 5:27-32  
Psalm 118:14-23

Revelation 1:4-8  
John 20:19-31

There's always that one person in a group with the courage to speak their mind. Maybe there's more than one, but there's always at least one. Who is that person in your life? Maybe it's a friend or a coworker, or maybe it's a family member. Maybe it's you! Picture that person who always says what they're thinking, with limited filters and without fear of what others may think. This is that person who blurts out what everyone else is usually really thinking, but for one reason or another they won't say out loud.

I think in Jesus' inner circle of friends, Thomas was one of those people. Those direct, honest, truth speakers who gave voice to what everyone else was really thinking. Every time he is mentioned in the Gospel of John, evidence of this characteristic is given. Thomas is a no-nonsense, straight-talking guy, who acts as a mouth-piece for the disciples.

We first hear about Thomas in John 11:16. It's the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. In the narrative, Jesus was planning to head to Judea where Lazarus and his sisters lived. Meanwhile, the disciples were trying to talk him out of it, because it was dangerous for Jesus to go there. The leaders wanted to arrest Jesus and kill him. Enter Thomas. It is at this point that Thomas makes his first appearance in John's Gospel. He does so with a bold statement: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." In this statement, Thomas acts as the spokesperson for Jesus' disciples. He recognizes that Jesus' mind is set and so Thomas bravely steps up to the plate, vowing to follow Jesus whatever may come next. He had the courage to say what the rest of the disciples wanted to, but were afraid to say.

Thomas next appears in John 14:1, when Jesus is talking to his disciples about his impending death and ascension to heaven. It's unlikely that the other disciples had a clue about what Jesus meant but they remained silent. Not Thomas. He spoke up and essentially said, "Jesus, I have no idea what you're talking about." Thomas is a straight shooter, a practical guy with an inquiring mind. Not only does he speak boldly and with courage, he also asks the tough questions that others may be scared or embarrassed to ask.

Given what we know about Thomas in John's gospel, what happens in today's narrative really isn't all that surprising. Thomas stays true to form. When the risen Lord appears to the disciples in the locked room, Thomas wasn't there. We don't know where he was at the time or where his friends find him, but they tell him the news. The rational and realistic Thomas demands, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." This is not a simple; "I'll believe it when I see it." Thomas has conditions. He puts conditions on his faith. He wants hard evidence, unquestionable eyewitness fact that Jesus is truly risen from the dead.

I can't blame him. Can you? He only asked to see what all the other disciples already saw. Jesus already appeared to them and offered his scared body as evidence of his identity. If any of Jesus' other disciples had been missing from that encounter, I wonder if they would have spoken up like Thomas. They may not have, but I bet they would have been thinking it!

Eight days after Thomas makes his demand, his wish comes true. Jesus appears and speaks directly to Thomas. Scripture doesn't tell us if Thomas ended up touching Jesus' wounds or not. Perhaps, Thomas forgot all his conditions once he was in the presence of the risen Lord. Perhaps the only thing he could spit out was, "My Lord and my God." In other words, maybe the presence of the risen Lord blotted out Thomas' skepticism, his demands. This was the glory of the risen Lord, and the only appropriate response was to confess him as Lord and God.

In Thomas, we see the pattern of Christian discipleship established from the beginning of John's Gospel. One person encounters Jesus. Then they share their experience with the next person, who may express some reluctance. Then that person experiences Jesus on their own, directly, and becomes convinced about him and shares the news about Jesus with the next person. Andrew tells Peter. Philip tells Nathanael. The Samaritan woman tells the townspeople. "Come and See" is the refrain.

When it comes to the resurrected Jesus, Mary Magdalene starts it off. She encounters Jesus, shares the news; the others don't really buy it until they have their own encounter so that they can own the experience. They become convinced and then share it with Thomas. Like the other disciples, Thomas doesn't come to the fullest faith until he has his own experience.

Our Gospel text invites us also to come and see, to experience God's abundance. There are no conditions attached to that invitation. We, like Thomas, are encouraged to speak the innermost questions and demands of our hearts and minds. God wants us to question and probe, to demand boldly, to seek with courage.

At our 10:30 service this morning, we will baptize a new member into the Body of Christ. The final prayer that we pray during the baptisms implores God to give the newly baptized, "an inquiring and discerning heart and the courage and will to persevere." At the beginning of our Christian life, in the waters of baptism, we are reminded that we are called to inquire, discern, and persevere with courage. Thomas exemplifies those qualities. Let us strive to be like him; let us push our faith as hard as we need to until we too are so awestruck by our Risen Lord that we, like Thomas, are moved to declare: "My Lord and my God!" Amen.