



Care & Share

The Faith of Thomas

By Dr. Marno Retief

I don't know about you, but it seems to me like we often give Thomas a hard time, don't we? When we want to reprimand someone for showing a lack of faith or for having their doubts about some or other Christian doctrine, what do we often say? We tell them, "Listen here, don't you be a doubting Thomas". Yes, we turn Thomas into the ultimate example of a doubter or - even more radically - we turn him into the archetype unbeliever. And, of course, some people - pointing out that Thomas was also called Didymus, a Greek word that means "twin" - say Thomas also personifies what it means to be double-minded, unable to make important decisions in your life. Come to think of it, I can't recall having ever heard a single positive sermon about Thomas. We sure give Thomas a rough time.

But what if I told you that our stereotyping of Thomas has been mostly wrong? What if I told you that we've actually treated Thomas quite unfairly? What if I told you that Thomas' faith journey is actually representative of the faith journey all of us will go through at some point in our lives? You see, in a certain sense, all of us are Thomas. I know this might sound very surprising to you but allow me to explain. Thomas' journey to faith in the risen Christ is the journey all of us go through as we become followers of Christ. When I look at how the Gospel of John tells Thomas' story, I notice five aspects of the faith journey all of us go through - sooner or later - as we come to faith in Christ.

Firstly, the problem of unbelief. John 20:19-23 reports how Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of the day of his resurrection. However, as we learn from John 20:24, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared to them the first time. Thomas was missing. Where was he? Why wasn't he assembled with the other disciples during such a crucial time, after everything that had happened in those tumultuous last days of Jesus' ministry? Where was he? Well, we don't know, but he wasn't there with the other disciples where he should have been. His absence caused him to miss an amazing encounter with the risen Jesus. Still, the other disciples were incredibly excited to share their experience with Thomas. And as soon as they got hold of Thomas, they told him, "Listen, Thomas! You won't believe it! But you've gotta believe it! We've seen the Lord! He appeared to us! He's alive! He's risen!" But Thomas refused to believe them. No matter how hard they tried convincing him, he would have none of it! And, of course, this is why we often criticize Thomas for his unbelief. Why didn't Thomas let go of his stubbornness and simply believe the other disciples? Well, we easily forget that

when Mary Magdalene and the other women went and told the disciples she had seen the Lord, they didn't believe her either! In fact, the Gospel of Luke records how the disciples thought they were telling them some idle tale! Clearly, neither Thomas nor his fellow disciples could boast about having great faith! No, both Thomas and the other disciples' natural Inclination was toward disbelief. And the same may be said of all of us. Our natural inclination is not to believe but disbelieve. Our natural state is one of total depravity. As the apostle Paul explains to the believers in Rome, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one'" (Rom. 3:9-12). So, the fact that Thomas didn't believe, shouldn't actually surprise us. He was simply acting according to his inherent sinful nature. The unbelieving, sinful nature all of us has before the Holy Spirit renews our hearts and minds.

Back in 1967, the late American psychiatrist and author, Thomas Harris, published a book entitled *I'm OK – You're OK*, which became a New York Times Best Seller. The book looked at how the method of transactional analysis could help people solve the problems in their lives. Anyhow, regardless of the well-meaning intent of the author, the title of the book propagates a complete lie, since – from a biblical perspective – the fact of the matter is that, by nature, you and I are not OK. By nature, I'm not OK and you're not OK. We're in bondage to sin, spiritually dead. So, the problem of unbelief wasn't just a problem for Thomas. It's a human problem. It's our problem.

But secondly, Thomas shows us people's need for evidence. In response to his fellow disciples' testimony that they have seen the Lord, Thomas famously responds, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25b). Thomas had a need for evidence – very specific evidence. He wanted to see and touch Jesus' wounds – nothing more, nothing less would satisfy him. But Thomas' is certainly not alone in asking for evidence. Scripture mentions other people who also insisted on some form of proof – some doing so sincerely, others insincerely. For example, while Jesus was suffering on the cross, some of the bystanders mockingly demanded evidence of his Messiahship by saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him" (Matt. 27:49). And as I already mentioned, Luke 24 notes how the disciples refused to believe the report of Mary Magdalene and the other women. Peter wanted to see evidence, so he ran to the tomb to take a look for himself. In the book of Acts, we read how the Jews of Berea searched for scriptural proof about the claims the apostle Paul was making. In fact, toward the end of the Gospel of John, the writer of the gospel emphasizes how his main reason for writing about certain signs Jesus did was that people "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31a). So, the Bible acknowledges the fact that people seek evidence. And as we've just seen from these examples, people seek various kinds of evidence – some seek biblical evidence, some seek physical evidence, some seek a specific sign from God. But the bottom line is – many, if not most, people seek some form of evidence. People have a need for evidence and the Bible acknowledges the reality of that need.

Thirdly, the story of Thomas shows us how Jesus invites us to examine the evidence. Eight days after Jesus initially appeared to the disciples, he appears to them again and this time Thomas is present. I can just picture the surprise on Thomas' face when Jesus makes his appearance! As excited and overjoyed as Thomas must have felt in those moments, I'm sure a part of him wanted to go and hide, especially after what he said to the other disciples a week earlier. But Jesus immediately turns his attention to Thomas and tells him, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27). Just think how shocked Thomas must have felt – Jesus heard what he said! Jesus heard his demands! But here's what's so amazing about Jesus' response to Thomas – Jesus doesn't rebuke Thomas for seeking evidence. Jesus doesn't say, "How dare you, Thomas! How dare you ask for evidence! I'm so disappointed in you! I'm so upset with you right now!" No, Jesus doesn't do that at all. Instead, the risen Jesus invites Thomas to consider the evidence he was looking for. Jesus invites him to touch his wounds, to examine the evidence he demanded to see. Jesus welcomes Thomas' need for evidence. He's not threatened by it, he's not intimidated by it. No, in a way, Jesus encourages it. "Come here, Thomas. Come and look at the evidence you were so desperately seeking, Thomas! Put your finger in my hands. Put your hand in my side. It's okay – come and touch my wounds."

Some of you might be familiar with the apologetics ministry of J. Warner Wallace, a homicide detective who's also trained Christian apologist. Around the age of 35, while still an atheist, Wallace, began studying the four gospels from the perspective of a homicide detective, applying the principles of homicide investigation to the various claims contained in the gospels, carefully weighing all the evidence. And for Wallace, the evidence was overwhelming – he became convinced about the truth of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. And after examining the evidence, he became a Christian. The story of Thomas teaches us that Jesus doesn't mind our need for answers. Whether it be Thomas in biblical times or J. Warner Wallace in modern times, Jesus invites us to carefully consider the evidence concerning him. But after examining all the evidence, we can't stop there – we need to decide what we believe about Jesus. Either he is who he claimed to be or he's not. You need to make up your mind. At some point, your search for answers must lead you to either accept or reject Jesus as the Lord of your life.

But this brings me to the fourth point – the story of Thomas teaches us how crucial it is to have a personal encounter with the risen Jesus. When Thomas' fellow disciples testified to him about their encounter with the risen Lord, he refused to accept their testimony. Their testimony wasn't sufficient proof for Thomas. No, Thomas wanted to encounter the risen Lord for himself. He wanted to experience Jesus in a personal way, not merely on the basis of what other people told him. Now in Thomas' case, he was granted the incredible privilege of having the risen Jesus appear to him in person. Jesus stood in front of Thomas in a visible, tangible way – more than that, he invited Thomas to literally touch his wounds. You can't get more personal than that! But, of course, as Jesus points out, Thomas came to faith on the basis of seeing Jesus in person, but subsequent generations of believers have not had that privilege. We come to faith on the basis of the apostolic testimony recorded in the four

gospels and the other books of the New Testament. And Jesus pronounces a special blessing on those of us who believe in him without having seen him directly. However, we shouldn't misunderstand Jesus words. While we might not have the privilege of seeing the risen Jesus face to face like Thomas and the disciples did, we still need to encounter Jesus personally. What do I mean? Well, you can grow up in a Christian home, you can go to catechism class, you can attend Sunday church services, you can know all the facts about Jesus' life, and examine all the available evidence – but none of this can automatically make you a Christian. None of this will give you the spiritual rebirth you need to believe in Jesus. Even the most convincing evidence about Jesus doesn't have the ability to renew your heart and mind. It's only through the powerful work of God the Holy Spirit – who gives us spiritual rebirth – that we're able to believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit invites us to a personal encounter with the risen Jesus. Through the Spirit's work in our lives, Jesus encounters each of us in a unique way. And as those of you who've been following Jesus for many years know, it's very difficult to describe this personal encounter with Jesus to other people. And quite often it's difficult to explain to other people when or where this life-changing encounter occurred. All you know is – by faith alone – you've encountered the risen Jesus and your life will never be the same again. Perhaps the apostle Paul explains this experience best when he says, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

But fifthly, and lastly, Thomas shows us the importance of confessing our faith. It's during his encounter with the risen Jesus that Thomas is moved to confess his faith in Jesus. After Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds, Jesus also tells Thomas to stop disbelieving and start believing. Thomas answers Jesus by making one of the greatest confessions of faith found in any of the gospels. Thomas calls Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). To put the importance of this statement into perspective, this is the only time in the four gospels where Jesus is directly addressed as God. Thomas, the man whom we so often criticize for being a doubter, makes the most powerful confession of faith recorded in any of the gospels! Through this confession, Thomas recognizes Jesus as both fully human and fully God. Jesus, the Son of God who took on human flesh by being born of the Virgin Mary, who lived his life on earth, and suffered and died on a cross, this same Jesus is now risen, and he is God. Also, note how Thomas makes his confession very personal – he calls Jesus "my Lord and my God." He isn't simply confessing some abstract truth about Jesus – this is truth that he personally accepts. Thomas' encounter with Jesus teaches us how our own encounter with Jesus should always lead to a confession of faith. Following Jesus is not just some emotional experience, following Jesus is rooted in acknowledging the truth of who Jesus is and being transformed by that truth. There are some religions that recognize Jesus as a historical figure and contend he was a wonderful teacher of truth, but they don't recognize him as Lord and God. Some of these religions might even confess they love Jesus. But we cannot follow Jesus or love Jesus if we don't accept the theological truth about him as revealed in Holy Scripture. So, confessing what we believe about Jesus is fundamental to our relationship with him. If you say you love Jesus, you'll want to confess the truth about him, just like Thomas did.

Thomas' journey of faith is the journey of faith all of us go through, albeit that each of us experiences this journey in a unique way. Along with Thomas, we start our journey in a state of unbelief, and we have a need for evidence. Along with Thomas, we examine the evidence available to us, and – through the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in us – we are led to encounter the risen Jesus. Along with Thomas, we cannot help but respond to the risen Jesus by declaring the truth of who he is. May we fall down to our knees in worship of the one who gave his life for us, and may each one of us continually call out to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Easter is behind us and yes, the ground was covered with snow. But now that the snow is disappearing we are recognizing signs of new life in the buds on the trees, green shoots out of the ground, etc. The services on Easter weekend were a real blessing. Thank you to Pastor Marno and the Worship Committee. Because of Easter, we can face the future. We have our ups and downs but our sins are paid for and we are not alone.

Later this month, we will celebrate Ascension Day. Ascension Day marks the moment Jesus literally ascended into heaven before his disciples, at the village of Bethany, near Jerusalem. We will commemorate this special day in the church calendar with a worship service on May 26th at 7:00 p.m. Hallelujah! We are living with an exalted Lord!

On May 5th, the Dutch celebrate the liberation of the Netherlands with thankfulness to the Canadian soldiers who fought for that liberation in 1945.

Mother's Day is the 8th of May. Many know what it takes to become a biological mother. However, there are many "moms" who do a great job by nurturing children without ever having given birth. We wish all of our moms a blessed day, surrounded by love and appreciation.

The month of May also gives us Victoria Day as a holiday, which this year falls on May 23rd. Queen Victoria was deemed "the mother of Confederation". She was born on the 24th of May, 1819. She reigned as Queen of England for 63 years, 7 months and 2 days. She died in 1901. In 1952 the Canadian government made the third Monday of May a holiday set aside as Victoria Day.

Continue to pray for those among us who are dealing with health issues:

- Ted Kaemingh is doing well after his cataract surgery.
- Kathy Stahn remains in the Fort Frances hospital.
- Kay Redford has had a MRI and is waiting for results and is currently undergoing physio for her back.
- Jack Esselink is dealing with and being treated for vertigo.

Congratulations to the families who have recently celebrated births in their family:

- Born to Richard and Kelsey Wieringa on March 30th – Soraya Richelle Wieringa. A baby sister for Chaz and Slater. Congratulations also to grandparents, Gerald & Colleen!
- Born to Lake and Marissa Esselink on April 8 – Lane Thomas John Esselink. A baby brother for big sister Paisley. Congratulations also to grandparents, Gary & Betty!

We'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks for your prayers, concerns, cards and condolences during our sister-in-law Jeanette van Heyst's brief illness and peaceful passing. She was much loved by all who knew her and her light shone for Jesus throughout her life. It is our prayer that the Lord's presence will continue to comfort all who mourn. Don and Jeanette were blessed with nearly 67 years of marriage, for which we give thanks. Thank you all for being a caring church family!

Sincerely, Peter and Leona van Heyst and family
Arend and Wilma Wielinga and family

Congratulations to all who will celebrate birthday and anniversaries in May. We have one senior celebrating a birthday in May, Ynske Kaemingh on May 5th.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH:

A mother of influence teaches her children to value themselves as children of God.

*A memorial service for
the late
Arie Borger
will be held on
Thursday June 2 at 1:30pm
at First Christian Reformed
Church
Thunder Bay, Ontario.
Luncheon to follow
the service.*

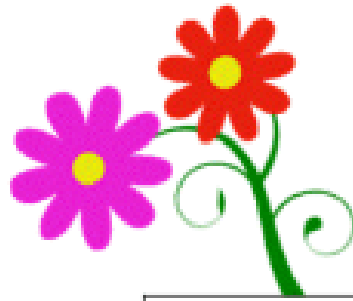
*An internment service
will be held on
Friday June 3 at 1:30pm
at the Emo Cemetery
followed by a luncheon at
the
Emo Christian
Reformed Church.*

*The family of the late Arie
Borger would like to invite our
church family to his memorial
service in Thunder Bay and/or
internment service in Emo.
(Details on invitation.)*



May

	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalms	Proverbs
<input type="checkbox"/> 01	Judges 13:1-14:20	John 1:29-51	Psalms 102:1-28	Proverbs 14:15-16
<input type="checkbox"/> 02	Judges 15:1-16:31	John 2:1-25	Psalms 103:1-22	Proverbs 14:17-19
<input type="checkbox"/> 03	Judges 17:1-18:31	John 3:1-21	Psalms 104:1-24	Proverbs 14:20-21
<input type="checkbox"/> 04	Judges 19:1-20:48	John 3:22-4:3	Psalms 104:24-35	Proverbs 14:22-23
<input type="checkbox"/> 05	Judges 21:1-Ruth 1:22	John 4:4-42	Psalms 105:1-15	Proverbs 14:25
<input type="checkbox"/> 06	Ruth 2:1-4:22	John 4:43-54	Psalms 105:16-36	Proverbs 14:26-27
<input type="checkbox"/> 07	1 Samuel 1:1-2:21	John 5:1-23	Psalms 105:37-45	Proverbs 14:28-29
<input type="checkbox"/> 08	1 Samuel 2:22-4:22	John 5:24-47	Psalms 106:1-12	Proverbs 14:30-31
<input type="checkbox"/> 09	1 Samuel 5:1-7:17	John 6:1-21	Psalms 106:13-31	Proverbs 14:32-33
<input type="checkbox"/> 10	1 Samuel 8:1-9:27	John 6:22-42	Psalms 106:32-48	Proverbs 14:34-35
<input type="checkbox"/> 11	1 Samuel 10:1-11:15	John 6:43-71	Psalms 107:1-43	Proverbs 15:1-3
<input type="checkbox"/> 12	1 Samuel 12:1-13:23	John 7:1-30	Psalms 108:1-13	Proverbs 15:4
<input type="checkbox"/> 13	1 Samuel 14:1-52	John 7:31-53	Psalms 109:1-31	Proverbs 15:5-7
<input type="checkbox"/> 14	1 Samuel 15:1-16:23	John 8:1-20	Psalms 110:1-7	Proverbs 15:8-10
<input type="checkbox"/> 15	1 Samuel 17:1-18:4	John 8:21-30	Psalms 111:1-10	Proverbs 15:11
<input type="checkbox"/> 16	1 Samuel 18:5-19:24	John 8:31-59	Psalms 112:1-10	Proverbs 15:12-14
<input type="checkbox"/> 17	1 Samuel 20:1-21:15	John 9:1-41	Psalms 113:1-114:8	Proverbs 15:15-17
<input type="checkbox"/> 18	1 Samuel 22:1-23:29	John 10:1-21	Psalms 115:1-18	Proverbs 15:18-19
<input type="checkbox"/> 19	1 Samuel 24:1-25:44	John 10:22-42	Psalms 116:1-19	Proverbs 15:20-21
<input type="checkbox"/> 20	1 Samuel 26:1-28:25	John 11:1-54	Psalms 117:1-2	Proverbs 15:22-23
<input type="checkbox"/> 21	1 Samuel 29:1-31:13	John 11:55-12:19	Psalms 118:1-18	Proverbs 15:24-26
<input type="checkbox"/> 22	2 Samuel 1:1-2:11	John 12:20-50	Psalms 118:19-29	Proverbs 15:27-28
<input type="checkbox"/> 23	2 Samuel 2:12-3:39	John 13:1-30	Psalms 119:1-16	Proverbs 15:29-30
<input type="checkbox"/> 24	2 Samuel 4:1-6:23	John 13:31-14:14	Psalms 119:17-32	Proverbs 15:31-32
<input type="checkbox"/> 25	2 Samuel 7:1-8:18	John 14:15-31	Psalms 119:33-48	Proverbs 15:33
<input type="checkbox"/> 26	2 Samuel 9:1-11:27	John 15:1-27	Psalms 119:49-64	Proverbs 16:1-3
<input type="checkbox"/> 27	2 Samuel 12:1-31	John 16:1-33	Psalms 119:65-80	Proverbs 16:4-5
<input type="checkbox"/> 28	2 Samuel 13:1-39	John 17:1-26	Psalms 119:81-96	Proverbs 16:6-7
<input type="checkbox"/> 29	2 Samuel 14:1-15:22	John 18:1-24	Psalms 119:97-112	Proverbs 16:8-9
<input type="checkbox"/> 30	2 Samuel 15:23-16:23	John 18:25-19:22	Psalms 119:113-128	Proverbs 16:10-11
<input type="checkbox"/> 31	2 Samuel 17:1-29	John 19:23-42	Psalms 119:129-152	Proverbs 16:12-13



Mother's Day

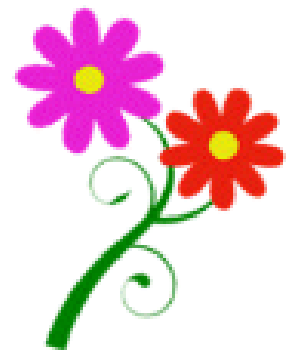
Second Sunday of May




APPRECIATION
 BEAUTIFUL
 BREAKFAST
 CANDY
 CHARMING
 COMFORT
 DEVOTED
 FLOWERS
 FORGIVING
 GIFTS

GUIDANCE
 HUGS
 JEWELRY
 JOY
 KISSES
 LAUGHTER
 LOVE
 MATERNAL
 MOM
 MOTHER

NURTURE
 PERFUME
 PROTECTIVE
 SHARE
 TELEPHONE
 TENDER
 THE BEST
 WARM
 WISE



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:00 WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL PIZZA LUNCH & ROAD HOCKEY 5:00 PRAISE & WORSIP	2 9:45 DORCAS	3 10:00 MOMMY CONNECT 7:00 COUNCIL	4 Jenna Mack Vince & Dayle Allan (26th) 7:00 EMO DISCIPLE SHIP SCHOOL (EDS)	5 Ynske Kaemingh Jennie Kooistra	6 Dale Kaemingh	7 *Arnold & Cindy Kaemingh (39th)
8  10:00 WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL	9 *Dan & Elaine Mack (35th)	10 10:00 MOMMY CONNECT	11 7:00 EDS	12 Laura Dykstra Aliyah Kaemingh	13 Emrys Crans Lori Wilson	14
15 Tessie Spyksma Kacia Gerber 10:00 WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL	16 Albert Strydhorst	17 10:00 MOMMY CONNECT 7:00 CONSISTORY	18 Arnold H Kaemingh 7:00 EDS	19 Carolyn Stang Gerald Wielinga	20 Kate Agombar	21 Harold Kelly Joel Veldhuisen
22 Taylor Hettinga Maddysan Redford Diane Veldhuisen Eric Veldhuisen 10:00 WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL	23 Tammy Wielinga	24 Patrick deGroot Brooks Kaemingh Colin Kaemingh 10:00 MOMMY CONNECT	25 Bethany Sinninghe 7:00 EDS	26 Sydney Beck Chantel Kelly Bodie White *Joel & Kaity Veldhuisen (10th)	27 Camryn Veldhuisen Pete Veldhuisen	28 Bev Arpin Lucas Veldhuisen
29 Ethan Esselink *John & Kay Redford (29th) 10:00 WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL	30 Remco Van Zwol Kali Wieringa	31 Nova Kaemingh *Gerald & Diane Veldhuisen (36th) 10:00 MOMMY CONNECT				