

SERMON

“Thomas, The Truth Seeker”

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Who really shot JFK?

**Did Jeffrey Epstein commit suicide,
or did someone kill him?**

Were the moon landings real or staged?

**Was Paul McCartney replaced by a look-alike
when he allegedly died in 1966?**

Was 9/11 staged by the U.S. government?

Are **all these questions crazy?**

**Many Americans seem to love a good conspiracy theory,
and their weakness for paranoid fantasies
may be embedded in our history.**

**Some historians speculate that the Founding Fathers
were moved to write the Declaration of Independence
because they believed that Britain was about
to enslave American colonists.**

The idea that there is some **shadowy group pulling strings
behind the scenes in our history has been a constant theme
for conspiracy theorists who believe
things are not as they appear.**

**Many people are willing to believe that there is something rotten in
Denmark ... or Des Moines, or Dallas or wherever.**

**The 21st century has seen a rise in conspiracy thinking
with the internet being an unfiltered clearinghouse
for such theories.**

And the reality is that **in their own way these conspiracy theorists
are **Truth Seekers** as they are intentionally looking
for new information to explain what really happened.**

Their conspiracy theories usually gel around events of historical significance or the deaths of famous people.

When someone famous (or infamous) dies, the thinking goes, there must be a reason behind the reason being shared with the public.

Conspiracy theorists have a reputation for being a bit nuts, but the reality is that we always need people who are looking for the truth.

When it comes to the most famous death in history, the death of Jesus of Nazareth, conspiracy theories abounded, but in the center of this event we see someone who is truly trying to get at the truth.

And this figure is no outsider but one of Jesus' own disciples: Thomas, the original, "Truth Seeker."

The death and resurrection of Jesus have long been the target of conspiracy theorists trying to explain it away.

The general tenor of these theories is that the disciples acted in concert to claim that Jesus was alive when he really was not; that he died and the disciples "helped" him become "alive" again.

Some theorists speculate that Jesus did not actually die but just "swooned" on the cross and eventually staggered out of the tomb.

There are just a few problems with that theory —

- namely that the Romans were pretty good at the industrial application of death,**
- and John tells us that Jesus was speared in the side (19:31-37).**
- That would have been a heck of a swoon, and Jesus must have been in great shape to survive all that — more Superman than Savior!**

Others suggest that the disciples took the body of Jesus and hid it (a genuine concern of the chief priests, according to Matthew 28:62-66), and then claimed that he was alive.

Some speculate that the disciples had a mass hallucination of Jesus after his death caused by grief, or that they saw a ghost.

Despite 2,000 years of conspiracy theories, however, disproving the rumor of the resurrection has proven elusive.

After the death of Jesus, the disciples are hiding behind locked doors in fear of the Jewish leaders.

They have just heard from Mary Magdalene that morning that she had “seen the Lord,” but they could have easily dismissed her words as fake news (v. 18).

Women were not considered reliable witnesses in a court of law in the first century, thus they may have chalked up her claim to hysteria.

But then, suddenly, Jesus appeared among them with the greeting, “Peace be with you” (v. 19).

And then he shows them the evidence of the wounds in his hands and side.

**It is a strange combination:
Jesus is risen in a physical body
and yet can also appear through locked doors.**

This is a different kind of body, but a body nonetheless.

The disciples “rejoiced” after seeing the evidence (v. 20).

Mary’s testimony had been vindicated.

All of this happens without the disciple Thomas present.

**When the others tell him, “We have seen the Lord”
(the exact words used by Mary Magdalene),
Thomas is skeptical (v. 25).**

He is not taking their wild speculation for gospel truth just yet.

**“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger in the mark of the nails
and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (v. 25).**

**After all, the other disciples had had the benefit
of seeing the nail marks.**

Why shouldn't he?

**Thomas may have thought his friends were engaging in their own
collective conspiracy theory, and he was out to discover the truth.**

We know Thomas was a thinker, a questioner, a truth seeker.

**You remember in John chapter 14 when Jesus said
he was going to his Father's house to prepare a place
for the disciples.**

**It was Thomas who said to him,
‘Lord, we do not know where you are going.
How can we know the way?’**

**It was not that Thomas was afraid — after all, in chapter 11,
he was prepared to go with Jesus to a dangerous place,
even if it meant his own death (11:16).**

**It is just that Thomas was not going to buy
into any type of fake news.**

**He would not sell his own life cheaply based on false information
or wild speculation.**

We often call Thomas a “doubter,” but the truth is that we all need a Thomas in our churches someone who is willing to push back on what, at times, seems to be craziness.

Thomas is not a doubter so much as a legitimate “truth seeker.”

He simply wants the truth, which is something all of us should be seeking.

Thomas does not reject the idea of resurrection outright.

He simply wants more evidence, the same evidence the other disciples had received when Thomas was not present.

He wants to experience the risen Christ for himself.

And then, suddenly, he has the opportunity.

The pattern repeats:

- a locked door,
- an appearance by Jesus.

Jesus seems to know that Thomas had expressed some skepticism and offers the evidence that Thomas was looking for.

“Put your finger here and see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe” (v. 27).

First, keep in mind that the other disciples had the benefit of evidence which they saw with their own eyes — evidence that was not available to Thomas.

Second, Thomas’ doubts are not about the resurrection of Jesus, but about the reports of the resurrection of Jesus.

When he saw Jesus, he had no doubt that Jesus was alive.

He was quite skeptical, however,
about the accuracy of what he was simply hearing.

Third, although Jesus says to Thomas, “Do not doubt but believe,” he is not saying that Thomas has a problem with belief.

Jesus is saying, “Thomas, it’s me, in the flesh. Don’t doubt. Believe. It’s okay.”

And finally, what Jesus says to Thomas in verse 29 applies equally to all of the disciples, not just Thomas.

Jesus said, “Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have come to believe.”

All of the disciples believed that Jesus was alive **only** because they saw Jesus in the flesh.

Like Thomas, they did not believe the reports of Jesus’ resurrection either.

So, we must ask:

How are the disciples any different than Thomas?

Thomas did not believe the report of the disciples,
and the disciples did not believe the report of the women.

Note that John does not tell us that
Thomas takes Jesus up on his offer
and actually touches his wounds.

It seems that the presence of Jesus is finally enough for Thomas.

And what John implies, powerfully, is that the presence of Jesus should be enough for us, too.

How do we experience the presence of the Risen Christ?

We cannot touch him.

We cannot see this person in the resurrected flesh.

I can only attest to how I experience the presence of the Risen Christ:

- **In the face of an infant as I see God re-newing life and fulfilling the promise that life is eternal;**
- **When the illness is cured;**
- **At a death bed as the family lets go trusting their loved one is transitioning to a new and better place;**
- **In God's creation as new life springs forth after a long winter, reminding us that new life occurs again and again;**

“Have you believed because you have seen me?” says Jesus.

“Blessed are those who have not seen (me) and yet have come to believe” (v. 29).

We experience the presence of the risen Christ because the Holy Spirit has been given to us and enables us to witness the resurrection and ongoing presence of Jesus in our lives.

Evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is important.

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is quite compelling from a historical perspective.

If those first disciples were going to make up a story to impress others in the first century, for example, they **would not have a woman as your primary witness.**

They **would not proclaim that a body had risen from the dead in a Greco-Roman world that **devalued** the body.**

The pagans already believed in the immortality of the soul; *that* theory they would have easily bought.

But to claim that a dead body was alive again?

Tinfoil hat time!

And Jews would say that anyone who was crucified was cursed, and that resurrection was a distant hope.

This message would have been virtually unintelligible, ludicrous, and historically untenable in the first-century world, the equivalent of claiming you and me of having seen a UFO.

And yet there was a large body of people who claimed that the impossible had become possible and despite all kinds of efforts to quiet them, they **NOT shut up about it.**

Charles Colson, who was special counsel and “hatchet man” for President Richard Nixon, was indicted in the Watergate scandal (an actual conspiracy) and went to prison for seven months.

While in prison, Colson became a Christian and remarked that it was his own criminal conviction that proved the resurrection to him.

He put it like this:

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How?

Because 12 men testified, they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it.

Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, and/or put in prison.

They would not have endured that if it weren't true.

Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world — and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks.

You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years?

Absolutely impossible,” said Colson.

We have the eyewitness testimony of the gospels, the evidence of the early church's growth despite all the factors arrayed against it, and the witness of subsequent generations of Christians and martyrs.

All attest to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

If it is a conspiracy theory, it is one that has actually stood the test of time and the scrutiny of generations of debunkers.

John wrote his gospel not only to give us evidence *for* Christ, but also to bring us to faith *in* Christ.

As he puts it later in the text: “But these things are written so that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (v. 31).

Ultimately, our belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of faith, backed by our personal evidence and experience of the Risen Christ in our lives.

When we believe, we begin to see all that God has done, all that God has made possible through the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

And when we **live out that belief, it is then that we become **living examples**, proving that the gospel is more than a theory.**

It is **a way of life and **the** way to life.**

****Because** we have experienced the presence of the Risen Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we lead a **NEW** life in Christ.**

We offer forgiveness **instead of seeking revenge.**

We are selfless and **not selfish, desiring to serve **not** to be served.**

**We are sheep and not goats because we see the Risen Christ
in those society has forgotten –
the hungry,
the poor,
the stranger in our land,
the lonely,
the homeless,
those in prison,
and we respond as Jesus would –
feeding,
visiting,
welcoming,
and providing for those who need us.**

**C.S. Lewis once famously remarked that he believed in Christianity
just like he believed in the sun:**

**“Not only because I see it,” he said,
“but because by it I see everything else.”**

**Picking up on Lewis’ comment, Brandon Ambrosino,
who covers culture and religion for Vox.com, wrote,
“That’s how I see Jesus’ resurrection;
not so much an event I look at, *as an event I look through.***

For me, it remains the interpretive key to the entire universe.

**Each morning, the sun is reborn;
each spring, harvests come back to life;
after each disappointment, our dashed hopes are reanimated,
and soar to even newer heights.**

**For all the death
and evil
and greed
and ugliness of our world,
I can’t shake the fact that every last atom of this place
is pulsing in time with the rhythm of resurrection.”**

So, as we gather on this Sunday after Easter,
it is **not** to look for more evidence to confirm
that the resurrection of Jesus happened,
but to **celebrate** how it **helps** us interpret the world,
and to receive from it both our daily hope
and our long-term optimism.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (Traditional) The Apostles' Creed

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;
he descended into hell;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

PRESENTATION OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

You may place your offering in the plate by the door
as you exit the sanctuary.

CALL TO OFFERING

According to Matthew,

“Freely, we have received, freely we are to give.”

Please share your gifts by placing them in the offering plates
as you leave the sanctuary.

As the choir shares their musical offering,
let us re-commit our hearts to our Lord and Savior.