

May 2, 2004

Easter 4C

We are in the third week of a 7 week series on the
TRUTH ABOUT THE
RESURRECTION.

We are looking at the 7 weeks between Easter and Pentecost...
and exploring what happened in
chronological order....

By combining the 4 gospel
accounts as well as some
information from Paul's letters.

To summarize what we have learned so far, On the morning of Easter...when it was still dark...
at least five women headed for the
tomb of Jesus.

They found the stone rolled away, the guards gone and when they looked inside they saw that the body was
gone.

Over the next few hours Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene...

Then to the same women who went to
the tomb...
as they walked on the road toward
where the disciples were staying.

We learned that the guards went to the Chief Priests after the angel came and rolled away the stone...

And together they hatched a plan to say
that the body was stolen by Jesus'
disciples....
a story believed by the Jews to
this day.

That somehow, the disciples had overcome 12 guards and moved a 2 ton rock with big levers....
to steal the body.

Meanwhile, the disciples at first thought the Jews and Romans had stolen the body.

Each was blaming the other for the
missing body....
Until Jesus began to appear to
them and the facts became clear.

So by noon on Easter...Jesus had appeared twice...to Mary Mag. and the women...
and not yet to his disciples.

Then as we learned last week, in the afternoon....two people...a man named Cleopas and another person who is
not named...both followers of Jesus...
were headed home to Emmaus...
a 7 mile walk from Jerusalem.

And Jesus appeared to them on the road...
walked with them and explained the
scriptures to them.

They didn't recognize him as Jesus until he was at dinner with them and he broke the bread and gave it to
them...
just as Jesus had done at the
Last Supper.

As soon as they recognized him he disappeared...
And Cleopas and his friend ran back to
Jerusalem to where the disciples were
gathered.

They found the disciples gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

They explained what had happened and the disciples told them that Jesus had appeared to the women too...and
also to Peter.

We are learning a little bit about what resurrected bodies are like here.

Most of these people did not recognize Jesus at first when he appeared to them.

They didn't say he looked strange in any way...like an angel, for example...
It seems he looked like a person...just
not like anyone they knew.

But then either by something he said...or by something he did...
they suddenly recognized him.

So resurrected bodies don't necessarily look the same as before they died.
That's good to know because some day
we will each have one...
a resurrected body!

Another thing we learn is that resurrected bodies defy some of the laws of nature.

Jesus seems to just appear from out of nowhere and then disappear in the same way.

And as they were gathered there in that room...in someone's home...
those disciples...

There would have been:
10 disciples (not Judas and not Thom)
Cleopas and his friend
At least 5 women

So at least 17 people...probably more were gathered there that Easter night.

And you can imagine the conversation...

“Why did he appear to these women and not to his disciples?”

“Now what? Will we see him again?”

“Will he NOW overthrow the Romans?”

And as they were discussing all of this...suddenly Jesus stood in their midst

He is in the room and didn't come through the door.

He greets them in a very traditional way...

“Peace be with you.”

Luke says they were startled...like they saw a ghost!

And Jesus asks them why they are troubled....why are there doubts in their minds.

He says, *“Look and my hands and my feet.”*

“It's me!”

“Touch and see for yourself.

No ghost has flesh and bones.”

And then Luke tells us that even then as they touched his hand and feet...

saw the holes from the nails...

some still weren't sure.

And then, Jesus asks if they have anything to eat?

They handed him a piece of broiled fish..

and he ate it as they watched.

Jesus is doing all of this that they would KNOW for certain that he had risen.

He did not want them to have any

doubt of it.

While he was eating...he said..

“This is what I told you when I was still with you.

That everything in the scriptures about

me would be fulfilled.

And then, just as he did with Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus..

He explained the scriptures to them

and they understood.

He showed them where it says the Messiah would come and be killed and then rise on the third day..

for the forgiveness of sins...

...and that this gospel message would be preached first in Jerusalem and then to all nations of the world.

Then he tells them that he is going to send them what his Father had promised.

He breathed on them and say..

Receive the Holy Spirit

He was foretelling what would happen on Pentecost...7 weeks later.

But he told them to stay in the city...stay where they were...
until they have been clothed with
power from on high.

Then he said something that must have sounded very strange to those disciples...
As if the entire day hadn't been
Strange enough....

He says that anyone's sins that they forgive...will be forgiven...
And any they do not forgive...are not
forgiven.

The direct translation goes like this...

"Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven."

Clearly, God does not forgive people's sins because WE do so,
nor does he withhold forgiveness
because WE do

Those who proclaim the gospel, are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins ,
depending on whether the hearers
accept or reject Jesus.

God forgives sins.

All we can do is pronounce the forgiveness as a fact.

And then he left...and we are not told how he exited.

What a day it had been! All of this happened on Easter.

At least 17 people had now seen Jesus in the flesh...saw him eat...felt his hands and feet.

But even among this group...it seems that some still had a hard time believing what they were seeing.

Wouldn't you? I would!

And then a week passes...

We don't know what went on that
week, but we can assume the disciples
were staying out of sight.

Sometime that week...Thomas came back to join the group.

It may have been just minutes after
Jesus left, or sometime during the next
week.

When Thomas came in, the other disciples told him, *"We have seen the Lord."*

But Thomas wouldn't believe it.

He said that unless he could put his
fingers into the nail holes in his hands
and his hand into his side...
he would not believe.

Thomas has ever since that time been tagged with the title, DOUBTING THOMAS.

As if everyone else had such great faith and Thomas did not.

But Thomas was asking for no more proof than the other disciples had had...right?

THEY touched the nail holes..
He just wanted to do the same.

Can you imagine what he must have been thinking...?

"Why would Jesus appear when he knew I was gone?"

How totally out of it he must have felt!

Did you ever show up late to a celebration...

Where you had missed everything and
shown up late...
and everyone wanted you to be as
excited as they were...

But you just couldn't...
You had missed it.

And so Thomas was being stubborn about it...but no more so than others would have been.

Remember, when the disciples first heard from the women that the tomb was empty, they didn't believe it either.

So there was plenty of doubt going around!
And had you or I been there...
we would probably have doubted too.

And then the following Sunday...a week after Easter...

the disciples were in that same house
and Thomas was with them too.

Again, while the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.

Notice that there are no details as to HOW he got in the room....no one admits seeing him actually come in...
Did he walk through a wall or what?

These are 21st century questions...we want to know HOW.

But what was important to them was that he was suddenly standing among them.

He greeted them again with

Peace be with you."

And then he immediately starts walking walks over to Thomas....
Can you feel the tension in the air?

*Put your finger here. See my hands?
Now, put your hand into my side.
Stop doubting...and believe.*

Thomas had but one thing to say...
My Lord and my God.

That statement is the highest point of faith.

To call Jesus his Lord and his God is the essence of the faith we are called to have.

Then Jesus told Thomas that because he saw...he believed....
but blessed would be those who DO
NOT see...yet believe.

He was talking about you and me,
wasn't he.

We don't see his hands and feet physically before us...
yet we believe.

And again, Jesus departed.

So what do we know of this Apostle Thomas?

Well, he is only mentioned two other times.

The first is when Jesus and the disciples are outside the city and they receive word that Jesus' friend Lazarus had died.

Now, the last time Jesus had been in Jerusalem they had tried to stone him...
So when he said he was going back to Jerusalem to see Lazarus...some disciples tried to discourage him...
saying it was too dangerous.

But Thomas, says, *"Let us all go and die with him, if that is to be."*
A tremendous statement of faith.

The second time we hear of Thomas, Jesus was telling his disciples he was going to go away and would be making a place for them.

Jesus said to them,
"You know the way to the place where I am going."

And Thomas responds...
"We don't know the way... because we don't know where you are going."

And Jesus says, *“I am the way, the truth and the life...no one comes to the Father except by me.”*

It was Thomas’ question that sparked that statement by Jesus.

Thomas was clearly a devoted and serious apostle.

We fail to do him justice when we call him ‘doubting Thomas.’”

Later on, after Pentecost, Thomas boarded a ship that was trading spices with India..
and traveled with the ship to Malabar, on the southwest coast of India.

There, Thomas established churches and a group of Christians are there to this day...
and celebrate the Eucharist in
Aramaic....
the language Thomas would have
spoken when he arrived.

Thomas was eventually speared to death by an Indian king.

A church was later built on the site of
His death and exists there to this day.

So, although we don’t know a lot about Thomas....He had a deep faith...
and his commitment is unparalleled.

And so we come to the end of the first week after Easter.

At least 18 people have seen Jesus thus far.

We know that his resurrected body looks like a human body...consists of flesh and bones....
And that he ate food..like anyone else.

Yet he also moved about differently....
appearing and disappearing at will.

Between now and Pentecost, he will appear to more people and we will learn more about him....

He will do more things to make the case that he did indeed rise from the dead.

Amen