

Sermon Notes: April 24, 2022

Focus: Doubt and Faith

All Readings

St. Thomas is a major character in John

Thomas is the last person in the Gospel of John to be blessed with belief. Before his final encounter with Jesus, he had been the truest of true believers. Instead of calling him doubting Thomas, why don't we think about him as 'heartbroken Thomas' because, before the crucifixion, Thomas was the disciple most ready to die in Jerusalem. After the cross, Thomas was wondering if he had wasted his convictions on a lie. Who in their right mind wouldn't? He was openly wondering if Jesus had been just smoke and mirrors, and I don't think he was alone.

He was itching to believe, but it seemed to him like all the other disciples were just deceiving themselves. He just needed some reassurance. So, Jesus just shows up uninvited. Thomas had misunderstood Jesus, but he flipped hard once Jesus was in front of him. We don't have to lift Thomas up as some sort of skeptics' hero. He was just one guy who needed a little help over the hump.

I know that I am pushing a stone uphill, but I would love for you to imagine Thomas as more than a stand in for doubt. Thomas represents *misunderstanding converted to faith*. For the Gospel of John, our misunderstandings can be cleared up along the road to faith.

John uses the literary device of misunderstanding all the time

Many of the people Jesus encounters don't "get it" until they encounter him again. When they finally see him clearly, they follow. At the end of the Gospel, Mary Magdalene (thinking Jesus was a gardener) and "Believing" Thomas (today) are capstone stories of misunderstandings changed to faith. We can seek Jesus with our own of misunderstandings, knowing that God promises to reveal holiness at the right time.

Shorthand John's storytelling around misunderstanding:

1. Jesus speaks/acts truth.
2. The person says "huh?"
3. The person says something dumb.
4. Jesus sooner or later clears things up.
5. They get it.
6. They follow.

John 3 - Nicodemus doesn't get it

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you,

no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Nicodemus was a smart guy, but his own position and intellect were blocking him from understanding Jesus, but he did eventually get on the bus – John 19.

John 19 - Nicodemus Part 2

Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen.

Nicodemus was on long arc from misunderstanding to understanding. but he is “all-in” by the end.

John 4 - Samaritan woman gets it quickly.

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”...They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

She honestly misunderstood Jesus, but once she was on the same page with him, she would not stop telling anyone who would listen.

John 20 - Why St. Thomas is better than doubt

When we get to John 20, Thomas is the grand finale of the journey from misunderstanding to faith. We are loved through our misunderstandings to move into believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing we may have life in God's name (John 20:30).

I really like St. Thomas,
but who is this doubting Thomas you keep talking about?
I don't understand.

Todd