

Have you ever done something or said something that you later came to regret? You know, you make some bone-head mistake, or stick your foot all the way in your mouth... the kind of thing that those who witnessed it won't let you live down. My wife is/is not here this morning, so let's throw her under the bus... There is a sweater on my shelf at home that I have never worn. It's not because I don't like it, it's not because it didn't fit me when I got it. I've never worn it because the high heat of a dryer took a perfectly good, new Christmas gift and shrank it... Why do I still have it, you ask? Well, every once in a while I like to teasingly remind the love of my life of that one time she shrank my Christmas sweater ☺.

We've all done it. We've all said or done something that years later still brings chuckles and makes us the butt of a good inside joke – fond memories of mistakes made.

I imagine that if you could have interviewed Thomas years after the account we have before us today, he would smile and shake his head when you brought up the day he doubted the other disciples. John 20 was a day that Thomas would never live down. In fact, his name is synonymous with doubting to this day.

It's an easy thing to do, isn't it – to pick on Thomas for his stubborn disbelief? From our perspective it is easy to wonder, "How could he?" How could he be so stubborn? How could he so firm in his doubt?

How could he doubt the word of his closest friends? He had been around the other disciples and followers of Jesus for years. Couldn't he tell by their obvious excitement that what they were telling him was real, or at the very least, worth listening to? I mean, the last time he saw them they were as scared for their lives and as devastated over Jesus' death as he was, but now they are bubbling, and excited, and this drastic change still doesn't convince him?

How could Thomas doubt his closest friends, especially when you remember how many times Jesus had predicted the exact thing the other disciples were claiming had happened? Hadn't Jesus talked about rebuilding a temple in three days? Didn't he point to Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days and say that the same would be true of him? Hadn't he said just over a week earlier, **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life?"** I mean, even the Pharisees understood that Jesus was predicting his resurrection! That's why they asked Pilate to put a guard outside of Jesus' tomb.

How could Thomas doubt his closest friends when he had stood outside Lazarus' tomb and heard Jesus say, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me, will never die?"** How could Thomas doubt Jesus' power over death when he saw with his own eyes the previously dead Lazarus walk out of his tomb? How could

Thomas doubt Jesus' power over death knowing that this was the third time Jesus had brought a dead person back to life?

How could Thomas doubt the power of God like this? Either Jesus was true God, as he claimed to be (and had proven himself to be through all his amazing miracles that Thomas saw with his own eyes), or he wasn't. Either Jesus had power over death or he didn't. We would think that of anyone, a disciple of Jesus would have seen enough proof to know that Jesus was true God and that he had power over everything, even death!

How could Thomas be so stubborn? How could he be so firm in his doubt?

But friends let's pause right here. Before I say one more word about Thomas, let's stop. Let's do a plank-removal procedure. You remember that little bit of instruction from Jesus, don't you? Jesus said that before we pass judgement on someone else's spiritual weakness or sin we need to make sure we remove the plank from our own eye, before dwelling on the speck of dust in someone else's eye – someone like Thomas.

How could he? Friends, how could you? How could I?

In Thomas we see someone doubting the power of God over everything, even death, and we rightly label that as sin – foolish sin. How often though, do you leave that plank of sin in your own eye as *you* doubt the power of God in your life?

Your words of stubborn doubt may not be recorded in the Bible for all people of all time to read, but that doesn't make your stubborn doubt any less real... any less sinful... any less foolish...

It's so easy to look at someone like Thomas and start playing the old comparison game. The old, "I may sin a little, but at least I haven't ____." At least I haven't ever demanded that the risen Lord show himself to me before I believe. At least I haven't asked to stick my finger in the nail holes and jam my hand in the spear wound!

You may not have ever doubted Jesus' resurrection with the same demands for proof like Thomas did, but does that mean you've never committed this particular sin?

Have you ever worried? Ever let a family sickness or an overwhelming to-do list get you down, rob you of peace, make you worry? If Jesus is strong enough to defeat death itself, don't you think he is strong enough to take care of any disease and any to-do list? How could Thomas? Friend, how could *you* worry like that?

Have you ever been anxious about the future? Ever looked at an election result and been anxious? Ever tried to look into your crystal ball at the direction this world and this country is going, looked at what the future might hold for you and your kids and been a little anxious? If Jesus is capable of governing all of history so that the events of Holy Week could happen in exactly the right way, don't you think he is capable of governing your life so that he will get you exactly where he wants

you to be? How could Thomas? Friend, how could *you* doubt the power of Jesus by being anxious?

Have you ever caught yourself searching for peace in the things of this world? Have you ever had the grass is always greener mentality? “If I can just get this job, if I can just make my house just right, if I can just lose those holiday pounds, if I can just make that relationship start clicking on all cylinders, then I can have peace, then I can rest and be happy.” Have you ever found yourself acting as if the promises Jesus has made you in the Bible are not enough to give you all the happiness and peace you need for today and tomorrow? How could Thomas? Friends, how could you? Either Jesus is true God and in control in your life, giving you your daily bread, or he is not? How could you doubt him like that?

It’s not just Thomas with a doubting complex, is it? The saying might as well go, “You are such a doubting Tim... or doubting Caleb... or doubting Sarah... or doubting Jacob.”

Jesus’ words for Thomas apply just as much to us: **“Stop doubting and believe!”**

Well, believe what? Three things jump out from this aftermath of that first Holy Week.

First, **believe in the amazing, all surpassing power of your Jesus**. Believe that there is a God who has power over everything. Nothing that transpired on that first Holy Week took place without him allowing it. Believe that this same God of power loves you and promises to give you more than you could ask for or even imagine.

Believe it because it is true. Just like Thomas doubting the resurrection of Jesus didn’t make it any less true, our doubting the power of our God to guide all of history and take care of us, doesn’t make his power any less potent. The only difference is the level of peace we have in this world. God wants us to find peace in his perfect power and plan for you. Stop doubting and believe.

Secondly, believe that Jesus died for a reason – that he died for you. He wasn’t the helpless victim everyone thought he was. He didn’t go to his death because the world forced him to. He died for you. He wanted to give up his life so that your sins of doubt and worry could be paid for. He died to give you everything, and if he was willing to die for you, don’t you think he willing and able to give you need for today and tomorrow?

Believe it because it is true. Just like Thomas doubting the resurrection of Jesus didn’t make it any less true, our doubt that Jesus secured for us everything we need does not make it any less true. Believe it because through his death Jesus wants to give you peace. Peace because you know that in a world full of sin, sin has been defeated. Peace because he died so that you and me and Thomas will never have to suffer the wrath of God for our doubts. Peace because we know that he who did not

spare his own life for you will graciously give you not only forgiveness, but your daily bread. So stop doubting and believe.

Finally, believe that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. He wanted to die so that you could be set free from sin, but even death itself wasn’t strong enough to keep Jesus from continuing to love you. He rose from the dead so he could make clear to the world that Good Friday was a good thing and not a bad thing. He rose so that he could proclaim that his death was not a sign of defeat but an amazing victory.

Believe it because it is true. Whether you believe it or not, it is true. Believe it because through his resurrection Jesus wants to empower you to smile at death itself. Believe it because through his resurrection Jesus wants to enable you suffer with peace. Believe it because Jesus wants you to know what peace feels like on a whole new level, in a way that this world can’t possibly comprehend – peace that comes from knowing, beyond any shadow of a doubt that death is not the end. That forgiveness and eternal life in heaven are real, and they are yours. So stop doubting and believe.

Believe that if Jesus had the power to rise from the dead, he has power unlike any other. He has the power to give you the peace you are incapable of finding yourself.

This last one is a biggie, isn’t it?

How amazing it is that even when he doubted Jesus, Jesus never stopped loving Thomas? And more than that, Jesus did what it took to create belief in Thomas’ heart. He loved Thomas too much to let him be dragged away by the lies of the devil because he wasn’t strong enough to believe in Jesus himself. He loved Thomas enough to create in Thomas’ heart the faith necessary to receive the peace he was offering in his resurrection.

Know, friends, that the same is true with you. Jesus does not just say, “Here are the facts, now believe them,” and then leave the rest up to us. He gives us the facts (in his Bible) and then he sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create faith in otherwise doubt-filled hearts.

It never ceases to amaze me how similar I am to the disciples. I share so many of their weaknesses. I put my foot in my mouth, I say and do foolish things. Far more often than I should, I have the audacity to doubt the power of the all-powerful God.

But it also never ceases to amaze me how great our God’s love is for me, for us. He not only lived, died and rose so that he could give us the gift of salvation, on top of that, he grabs ahold of us through his word, through Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper and *he* holds on to us, so that none of us miss out on the gift his power won us in our own weakness and doubt.

Friends, stop doubting and believe. He is risen. Amen.