

Thomas' Ultimate Claim "My Lord and my God!"

Last Sunday being Easter Day, we read through the first-half of chapter 20 of John. Remember that in this one chapter, John presents us with four different resurrection stories. But if you will recall, John does everything within his power to dissuade us from understanding the Resurrection as a literal, resuscitation of a human body. Why? Because bodies that rise from the dead will only have to die again. For John the risen Lord is so much more than a resuscitated, dead body. For John the risen Lord is God.

Just as he did with Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind from Birth, and Lazarus, John, author of the 4th Gospel, in this second-half of chapter 20 takes another relatively obscure disciple, brings him front and center, and gives him another award-winning role. His name is Thomas, doubting Thomas to be exact. But this isn't the SAG, or the Golden Globes, or the Oscars; no, this is an award-winning role that will say to the whole world who Jesus is.

Thomas is first mentioned in chapter 3 of Mark's gospel, and the only thing said about him is that he is one of the 12. Matthew and Luke basically make the same claim. Neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke give us one piece of biographical information about Thomas. Back in 1947 with discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, the text of what was to be called "The Gospel of Thomas" was found. All it consisted of was a brief 114-verse

collection of sayings. There was no mention of any miracles, no narrative of Jesus' birth, no narrative of his death, and no story about Easter. Most scholars believe that this gospel was written even before Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

Some believe that John wrote the 4th Gospel in order to refute or contradict the Gospel of Thomas. Perhaps, this is why John, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke develops Thomas into a major character. Some even go further, and suggest when John mentions "the beloved disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" John is really talking about doubting Thomas.

So what does John do? He clothes Thomas with an evolving personality.

- In the raising of Lazarus story, Thomas is identified as "the Twin."
- When Jesus is about to return to Judea, a place believed to be hostile territory for him, Thomas is quoted as having said, "Let us also go that we may also die with him (John 11:16)."
- In John's Farewell Discourses where Jesus talks over and over about the coming of the Spirit, Thomas appears once again. Jesus says, "You know the way where I am going (John 14:4)," and Thomas blurts out, "Lord, we do not know where you are going! How can we know the way (John 14:5)?"

John, author of the 4th Gospel, is doing everything within his power to make Thomas stand out in his disbelief from all the other disciples. Unlike Mary Magdalene who only wanted a personal relationship with Jesus, Thomas on the

other hand wants to touch the wounds. If Mary Magdalene wanted a personal experience with the risen Lord, then like all skeptics, Thomas wants evidence. As the line from the movie "Jerry Maguire" goes, "Show me the money." Thomas was a "show me" kind of guy. Give me proof.

John, author of the 4th Gospel, tells us that when the first appearance of the risen Lord occurred on the evening of the first day of the week, for whatever reason Thomas was not there. Then it all begins to make sense:

1. This second appearance will occur "eight days later."
2. The scene is exactly the same:
 - a. The doors are shut.
 - b. They are locked against the darkness of night.
 - c. And all of the fear that darkness brings.
3. And the amazing thing about it all is that the shut doors are no barrier against the presence of the risen Lord.
4. Once again as was the case with Mary Magdalene, physicality does not appear to be an issue here.

In the first resurrection story, John tells us that Jesus showed his hands and his side (John 20:20). In order to counter Thomas' skepticism, Jesus says, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing (John 20:27)." Apparently, Thomas does neither. He simply says, "My Lord and my God (John 20:28)." Thomas now knows that when we see Jesus, we see God.

Last Sunday, I said the resurrection means that we don't have to have experienced Jesus firsthand for him to call us each by name. Death has neither separated Mary, nor you or me from God. There is a future. Our future is with God.

It is Thomas who presents us with a correct understanding of the resurrection. His legacy becomes our greatest gift. Jesus asks Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Then Jesus adds the words for which this story and all of the gospels were written, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe (John 20:29)."

To give life and to be able to love as life is being ripped away from us is what it means to know the risen Lord. The crucified One is the presence of God among us.

**Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.**