



Third Day Living

Beyond Doubt or Disbelief

Biblical Text: John 20: 24-28

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(* - change slide on screens)

Last Sunday was Easter, and it was glorious! It was big! It was amazing!

Everywhere I went, people were talking about Easter at Old Mission!

*More than 1100 people gathered here to celebrate! *We baptized a baby, received new members, and we shared God's hope for our lives! And we claimed the Easter message that **"The worst thing is never the last thing!"*

It's a great message. God knows we need it – every day. Life isn't easy. And, this week, right on cue, the joy just kept on coming! The *Royals won on opening day, and kept right in winning! **It's been a pretty good week!** *

But, eventually, inevitably, we come down the glory of Easter Sunday into the real world of routine and responsibility – into the *"Season after Easter!"*

Work, school, bills, doctor's appointments all arrive on schedule. The *federal tax-filing deadline is looming, have mercy! And right on cue, our real estate tax statements arrived in our mailboxes – a double whammy!

And there it is! Easter joy contending with the struggles, doubts and disappointments of life! *It was that way in the very first season after Easter!*

That's the message of our text. It tells the story of Thomas, the apostle with the dubious distinction of missing Easter! * *"But Thomas (who was called the twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came."*¹

It could be the most *human* Easter story in the Bible. I wonder if any one of us has never struggled with doubt, disappointment, or disbelief? I doubt it.

Those words certainly describe Thomas. John 20:25 says, * *"Unless I feel the marks in his hands, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe."*²

But, just a week later, Jesus came again. And he said to Thomas, in John 20:27, * *"Touch my hands and my side. Do not doubt but believe."*³

¹ John 20:24. Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Copyright ©1989. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

² John 20:25, paraphrased by the author.

³ Ibid. John 20:27, paraphrased.

The magnificent Baroque artist, Caravaggio, has captured this moment in one of his most famous works, called * *“The Incredulity of Saint Thomas.”*⁴

His interpretation is our most usual one. Confronted by the evidence, as he touches Jesus’ wounds, *“Doubting Thomas”* moves from disbelief to faith, from doubt to belief. The problem is – **Caravaggio got it wrong.**

If we look at the text, we see that Thomas never does touch Jesus hands and side. Instead, listen now, **without** tactile proof, he sees with his heart! John 20:28 says: * *“Thomas fell to Jesus’ feet, saying: ‘My Lord, and my God!’”*⁵

That’s ultimately where we all must be. None of us has ever seen Jesus to put our hands in his, or touch his side. But Jesus has a message for us, * *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*⁶ (John 20:29)

When Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,”* he is saying something immensely important. We can do what Thomas did. **We can move beyond disappointment and doubt to faith!**

Some of us need to hear that faith has a place for us, doubts and all. Others of us need to allow our hearts to believe without tangible scientific proof.

I love what the prophet Micah said, in answering the question, * *“How shall I come before the Lord and truly worship?”*⁷ He didn’t say, *“Come with absolute certainty and condemn anyone who doesn’t think like you.”* But he also didn’t say, *“Come and have an intellectual debate about the existence of God.”*

No. Instead he said this: * *“What does the Lord require of you?”* * *“To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”* (Micah 6:8)

Micah’ guidance is incredibly simple to understand, and at the same time infinitely challenging to fulfill. But It also is the best way I know to make your own faith more certain. **Start by doing the things a person of faith would do.** *“Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”*

Every reliable sociologist I know also says it is also the most important thing that those of us who believe can do to share our faith with the increasingly skeptical culture around us. **Like Thomas, they want to see Jesus.**

⁴ *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* is by Caravaggio, c. 1601–1602. It is housed in the Sanssouci Palace in Berlin, Germany.

⁵ Op. Cit., John 20:28, paraphrased by the author.

⁶ Op. Cit., John 20:28. *New Revised Standard Version.*

⁷ Op. Cit., Micah 6:6, paraphrased by the author.

Many people don't believe in Jesus or the Church because they don't see him or the Church at work in their world. And I have been there.

A few Easters ago, I said: **“Without experiencing Jesus through others, I would have given up on organized religion long ago.”* For more than thirty years, every time I am burdened by disappointment or doubt, or disbelief, someone shows me the presence of Jesus!

That's why one of our major vision statements as a Church is to *“Take the Church to People.”* And that's why every year Old Mission has **Living 6:8 Sunday* and an entire weekend where we go into the community to serve!

It is named for that scripture from Micah 6:8 – but you know that by now.

On *“Living 6:8”* Sunday, people wear red, or their Old Mission T-shirts which share this message - **“ACT justly, LOVE mercy, WALK humbly.”* I don't know a better description for following Jesus than that!

Today, in our third year, all weekend long, Old Mission will engage in dozens of service opportunities. *** If you have not signed up yet, you and your family can just join me after worship and we will find you a place to serve!

But the truth is, it's not just about a Sunday, but a lifestyle of service. In a hundred or more different ways, we are all about showing Jesus to the world. Gleaning fields^{*}, tutoring children, sending resources to Haiti, one of the poorest counties in the world, serving meals for the homeless and often forgotten, distributing semi-trucks full of potatoes once a year, ministering to the poor at Crosslines, Spofford Home, the Johnson County Food Ministry, and dozens of more ways I haven't even remembered - we do that.

And every time we do, we chase away disappointment, doubt and disbelief.

We say to the world that ** “The worst thing is never the last thing!”* even when that worst thing is poverty, or fear, or hunger, or loneliness or despair, or feeling like no one cares. Thanks be to God!

And as the staff joins me, we have a song to sing, a call to serve, today.

(Staff anthem follows, “Go Forth for God.”)