

Christianity holds a special distinction among the world religions in that it is uniquely grounded in history (not fantasy or fiction), is rationally understood (not the suspension of critical/intellectual faculties), is built upon the foundation of tradition (not reinvented every five minutes by the latest “revelation”, i.e., it is good but very old news) and is personally authenticated through experience. In a phrase, our faith is a fully orbed one that engages every sphere of our being.

Last week we started looking at the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. There are 13 in all. We asked the question, “If Jesus truly died for our sins and was truly resurrected how are we to respond to him?” Answer: we do what the big, bad, bold disciple Peter did and love him with “all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Today we encounter another amazing post-resurrection appearance. Turn with me to John 20:19-20, 24-29:

**19** When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked in fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord...

**24** But Thomas one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." **26** A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

### **Fantastically Strange News**

The first human to personally experience the resurrected Jesus was Mary Magdalen. She, with unbridled enthusiasm, races to tell Peter and John the Good News:

**I talked with and touched Jesus. He's alive! And he said he will meet you in Galilee.**

Initially, Peter and John kind of believe Mary, but kind of don't. I mean, resurrections tend to be hard sells, but they immediately send word to the other nine disciples. Still not sure who or what to believe, they head to Galilee and lock themselves behind closed doors for fear of persecution. They wait with apprehension mingled with anticipation: “Could it be true?” “Is he really going to meet us here?” Their thoughts are interrupted by a familiar and soothing voice: “Peace be with you.” They are almost too afraid to look but they turn around and see Jesus who, out of thin air, has physically materialized before them.

### **O Thomas, Where Art Thou?**

When Jesus revealed himself to the disciples that evening, Thomas was nowhere to be found (v24). No one knows why, but if you hear the outlandish news that your Rabbi and friend has come back from the dead, you might want to drop everything to check it out. Perhaps the crucifixion shattered his faith. After all, the portrait of Thomas is that of a loyal but pessimistic follower. For me he's the “Eeyore” of the disciples. Once he says to Jesus, “If you have to die in Jerusalem, I'll die with you if that's what I need to do” (John. 11:16). When Jesus said, “I am going to a place where you cannot come,” Thomas objected, “Lord wherever you go, I'm coming with...” (John 14:5).

Somewhere between Resurrection Sunday and the following week, however, the disciples find Thomas and tell him Jesus is alive. Being a “nega-realist”, this claim activates Thomas’ baloney detector. Maybe he thought the disciples were hitting the ganja a little too often. His response (v25):

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark  
of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

In other words, “I don’t trust anything I can’t personally touch, taste, see, smell, and hear.”

### **Come on, Come on, and Touch Me Now!**

With much coaxing, Thomas begrudgingly goes with the disciples to see if their story holds water. Later that evening Jesus again materializes out of thin air and greets them with a familiar address, “Peace be with you.” A dazed and confused Thomas instantly resorts to naturalistic reasoning, “This is a disembodied spirit. I’m hallucinating. My mind is playing tricks on me. No way Hosea is this Jesus.” His thoughts are interrupted by Jesus who knows precisely what he is thinking (v27):

**Touch my crucifixional wounds Thomas and see that I am not a figment of your imagination. Go ahead, make your faith.**

### **Thomas’ Confession**

Contra Caravaggio’s famous painting, there is no evidence Thomas touched Jesus. What we do know however, is that he was so astonished by Jesus’ verification invitation he can only utter, “My Lord and My God” (v28)! Now for a good monotheistic Jew, this confession is breaking all the rules, particularly Commandments 1&2 which is punishable by death. A Jew could only confer such lofty titles on God himself but that’s precisely the point. This is God standing right there in front of him and Thomas feels the full weight of this phenomenon.

Thomas’ confession wasn’t a mere creedal statement like we have in the Apostles’ Creed: I believe... And it certainly wasn’t “My world-view includes a higher power that is inconsequential to what I think and do.” This confession is one of personal worship and ultimate allegiance. As “My Lord” Thomas is saying,

**Jesus, I now live in reverent and radical obedience to you.  
Never my will but always yours.**

Declaring Jesus as his “God” means that he sees Jesus as his ultimate Reality, ultimate Authority, and ultimate Presence.

### **Conclusion: The Beatitude**

Jesus responds to Thomas with a beatitude (v29):

**Blessed are those who believe but have not seen.**

In other words, he is saying, “Blessed are those who come to the same conclusion you do Thomas without the luxury of seeing or hearing.” Sometimes seeing is believing, but in God’s eyes, trusting what you cannot see, in this case, the identity of the crucified and resurrected Jesus, is far more impressive. As I like to put it,

**Faith is how we most glorify God and are most blessed in him.**

Jesus’ “blessing saying” applies to everyone born post 33 A.D. who declare Jesus as their “Lord and God” without empirical verification. What is the greatest blessing for those who Jesus said, “Do not doubt but believe” (v27)? Paul tells us in Romans 10:9

**If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Thomas got saved because he confessed with his lips and believed with his heart in who the resurrected Jesus was.

Have you?

Pray with me if you are ready to make your confession.