
Coming to Faith

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 12 April 2026

Acts 2:14a, 22-32 • John 20:19-31



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Ah, Doubting Thomas — maybe my favourite disciple. He represents for me so much of the humanity of the disciples. He is hard-headed, stubborn, taking nothing for granted. He has to be shown the wounds, the scars, the evidence of Christ's resurrection. No blind faith for him.

And Christ obliges him. He says, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe' (John 20:27). And Thomas does believe. He does not doubt the evidence of his own senses. Jesus is standing there, in front of him, in the flesh, with the holes in his hands and in his side. This is the same Jesus who died on the cross ten days before. Thomas says, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28).

And then Jesus says, a little reproachfully, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to

believe' (20:29). And you know, he's talking to us. He's talking to us, here in the 21st century, us who have never seen Jesus in the flesh, like the disciples did. *They* saw him in the flesh, both before and after the crucifixion. We have not had that privilege. We have had to "come to believe," as Jesus says. It is an invitation to us to come to believe, to move from a place of unbelief to a place where we could, perhaps, allow ourselves to make the choice of faith. For Thomas, the sight and feel of Jesus's wounds was the tipping point; after this night, he would always believe. But we don't have that benefit; we have to find our own tipping point, which brings us to faith; and we need to understand it, too, I think, if we are to help other people come to believe.

I've led quite a few funerals recently, in the last year or so. Some have been for parishioners here, past or present; some have been for people I didn't know, but since my name is on the lists of a few local funeral homes, I often get called to take a funeral when the family knows the deceased would have wanted a Christian service. Many of those who attend such funerals are not themselves active Christians, but there are usually many who are, if the departed one had a strong faith. There is usually a great outpouring of love at a funeral, as stories are told and memories shared. If the death was sudden, there may be great grief and shock. We find it hard to believe that someone can simply be gone from one moment to the next, if we weren't there to see them die. The body, or at least the ashes, is there at the front of the church. But where did that person go — the real person — the soul — the essence? What does death mean, and what does it do to us?

Well, these are big questions, but if we could have been standing with the eleven disciples in the upper room when Jesus appeared among them, we would have seen the answer. And when I'm at a funeral, looking around me at the beautiful building, and the faces of so many friends and family of the one who has died, I feel that we are indeed living out God's love, and that our Lord Jesus is there in our midst. Through the prayers and the eulogies speaks the voice of Jesus. We are his hands and feet and voice in this world, and in recognising the life of our brother or sister in Christ, we are sharing their love with each other. We are more than just a group of people in a building. We are the Body of Christ, brought together in the common mystery of life and death and faith.

It is because that love never dies that we never die. To say that love is eternal is the same as saying that we are eternal, for just as Christ is love, we too, when we devote ourselves to him, are love. As love is eternal, so we are eternal in Christ. Death cannot defeat us. An earthly life may be over, but we live on, because of the love we continue to feel. When we die and we go to be with Jesus, it is a return, not a first journey for us. As we were born in God's love,

and live in God's love through faith, we also return to God when our earthly life is over.

We do not need to see the wounds of Jesus; we do not need to touch them, as Thomas needed to. The physical wounds Jesus suffered are not important. After all, Thomas could have continued to be a skeptic even after touching the wounds. He might have said, "Oh sure, you have wounds, and you're standing here in front of me, alive. But how do I know it's not a trick, and some other fellow died on that cross?" You see, no amount of physical evidence is going to amount to positive proof in the legal sense. We must look inside ourselves for the truth of Jesus's death and resurrection; we must feel the truth of his love. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

But the average non-believer is not ready to take that step of faith right away. Jesus spent almost three years preparing his disciples for the truth of his mission on earth. He established himself as a teacher and a leader and a truth-teller, through his deeds and actions. They learned to know him, and to begin to recognise his oneness with the Father, at first imperfectly, but more and more directly as time went on. They did not believe at first; they came to believe. Similarly, we as Christ's disciples today will take some time to bring others to Christ. Our potential disciples must know and trust us before they will "taste and see that Christ is good." They must literally come — move — approach belief, in a gradual way.

So don't be discouraged when you look at the world and see all the people who don't know Christ. The love that never dies will be there for us, and for the ones we seek to bring to faith. That love is eternal in Jesus Christ — it won't go away. And the Body of Christ will continue to expand to include more and more of God's children. Let it be, O Lord, we pray. Amen.