

The Festival of St. Thomas, Apostle  
St. John 20:24-31  
December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022  
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Be Not Faithless, But Believing

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Scripture Text:**

Then saith He to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and see My hands; and reach *hither* thy hand, and put it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing." Thomas answered and said unto him, "My Lord and my God."

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the Festival of St. Thomas, the Apostle. It is also the first day of winter. On this day, and in reality, the days just before and after this, we have the least amount of daylight in the day. You may recall on the Festival of St. Andrew that I mentioned that St. Andrew has the honor of being the first of the Apostles, and of all the saints, in the Church's year, because he was the first Apostle who was called and followed the Lord + Jesus. On the day with the shortest amount of daylight, however, we celebrate the Festival of St. Thomas. His festival falls on the darkest day because of his unbelief at the Lord's resurrection. On account of his faithlessness, he gained the moniker, "Doubting Thomas." Doubting Thomas' festival falls on the day with the least amount of daylight as a testimony to his faithlessness.

For those who live without faith in the Lord + Jesus live in spiritual darkness. They live without the light of the Christ. They are faithless and unbelieving and so have no hope in the gifts that faith produces: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. This celebration on this darkest day is a reflection and testimony against the faithlessness of this generation. St. Thomas, the Apostle, is the example that the Church uses to speak against unbelief; the unbelief of this world.

Just like the world asks for signs—for proof—of the resurrection. So too, did St. Thomas demand that he would not believe until he saw the blow of the nail in his hand and cast his finger into it, and was able to cast his hand into the blow of the spear in the Lord's side. He demanded proof that the appearance of the Lord + Jesus was not just a phantasm—a ghost, an apparition. He wanted physical proof that the Lord + Jesus was risen from the dead. This sinful and faithless generation also demands that the Church prove that the Lord + Jesus is truly risen from the dead; that He is not just a spirit. The unbelief of the world is reflected in the unbelief of St. Thomas, who is called "Doubting Thomas."

St. Thomas is labeled with the moniker of being a doubter, but is this really fair? Holy Scripture clearly records the unbelief of the other Apostles, too. They disbelieved that the Lord + Jesus was

present in His flesh even while He was standing among them. St. Matthew in his Gospel records that the other Apostles thought he was an apparition—a phantasm, literally. The Evangelists also record that even after the Lord + Jesus had spent forty days with them—between the day of His resurrection and His ascension—there were some who still doubted whether this was truly the Lord + Jesus risen from the dead. So then, St. Thomas is not alone in his doubting the Lord’s resurrection. And yet, we celebrate his festival on the darkest day of the year, and call him “Doubting Thomas.”

If all the other Apostles doubted, too, why is St. Thomas singled out? St. Thomas embodies the unbelief and doubt of all those who would doubt the resurrection of the dead. This includes us, for even though we may confess a belief in the resurrection of the dead, it is a far too marvelous thing for us to truly comprehend. When our loved ones die, we confess that we will see them on the Last Day with a new glorious body alive and well once again, but all we see is the body being laid in the grave. We only see death and a tomb. We only see our dead loved one. That this body which we have laid in the grave will be raised from the dead and be living and talking and walking with us is truly too marvelous to imagine, especially in our grief at the loss of a loved one.

But the doubting of St. Thomas is for our benefit, and the benefit of all those who would doubt the resurrection of the dead; all those who would doubt that the Lord + Jesus has once and for all conquered death and the grave. For what does St. Thomas demand? He demands signs and proof, just like this unbelieving world—just like us. He wants to see the blow of the nails in the Lord’s hands, and the blow of the spear in the Lord’s side. These are the proofs he demands.

Eight days later, while the doors were shut, St. Thomas being with the other Apostles, the Lord + Jesus came and stood in the midst of them. He said to St. Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands.” And the Lord also said, “Reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side.” The Lord + Jesus gives the proof of His resurrection from the dead—of His conquering death and the grave—that St. Thomas demanded. His doubting is to our benefit, because the Lord proves that He is truly alive; He is not a ghost or apparition. He is truly alive in His flesh and blood. He has truly risen from the dead. And the Lord + Jesus keeps His wounds intact for us to see as proof that He was the One Who was crucified on the cross, Whose hands and feet were pierced with nails, and whose side was pierced with a spear after His death, so that water and blood poured out.

St. Thomas’s doubt, his demands for proof of the resurrection benefits us all. For through his doubt, we are given the proof of the resurrection of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Here in the wounds of the Christ are found all the proof of the resurrection that we, or the world needs. Therefore, my dear friends, be not faithless, but believing. Let us exclaim with St. Thomas, who saw the signs of the Lord’s death and resurrection, “My Lord and my God.” For he who doubted now has sure proof in which he can believe. And his testimony about what he saw and beheld, would serve him as he was sent out into the world to convince the world of the Lord’s resurrection; to convince the world of the salvation from death that can only be found in the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, alone.

Many who did *not* see what St. Thomas saw still believed on account of his eyewitness account. We are numbered among those who have *not* seen and yet believe. For we believe the eyewitness accounts of St. Thomas, and all the Apostles, who saw and touched the Lord + Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. For the Light of the Gospel has gone forth into all the world to shine in the darkness of this dark and sinful and unbelieving world. The Light of the Christ, in Whom we believe and cling to in faith, has filled our hearts with belief. We have thrown off all faithlessness and doubt, because we have believed that what the Apostles saw is true. We have believed all the things written about the Lord + Jesus Christ. And in believing we have eternal life.

Therefore, my dear friends, on this day with the shortest amount of daylight; on this darkest of days, let us remember that even in the midst of the darkness that fills and surrounds this world, we

have the Light of the Gospel in our midst. We have the testimony of Holy Scripture confirming for us that the Lord + Jesus is truly risen from the dead. He is the first fruits of all the living raised from the dead. We too, will be raised again from the dead on the Last Day. When we lay our loved ones in the grave, we have a hope that does not fade, for we are not faithless, but we are believing that they will rise again from the dead on the Last Day. We will be reunited with them in Heaven.

Rejoice, all ye believers, for we will behold with our own eyes that host of Heaven arrayed in white; the whole host of those raised from the dead. And we will see with our own eyes what St. Thomas, and all the Apostles also beheld. We will see the blow of the nails in our Lord's hands, and see the blow of the spear in His side, and we will rejoice that these wounds that He endured were for our salvation; so that we could live with Him in Heaven forever and ever.

This is why He will come to us in a few days as a Baby wrapped up in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. For our Lord + Jesus took upon our flesh, was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order that He might take these wounds into His flesh and save us and all of mankind. He humbles Himself by taking upon Himself our flesh, so that He might bear the punishment that we deserved on the tree of the holy cross. By this death He restores life to all mankind. And by these wounds, which St. Thomas demanded to see as a proof of the resurrection, we can now also believe and confess our faith in the Lord + Jesus, and be removed from the darkness of this dark and sinful world, into the everlasting light of our Lord's salvation. For this, Lord God, we all to Thee give praise. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*