

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Second Sunday of Easter]
April 11, 2021
Rev. YoungMin Kim

“Doubting Thomas?”
John 20:24-30

(1)

I hope you enjoyed happiness and the joyfulness of Easter during the week. While we celebrated the risen Christ during the week, the world, nation, and our community have still suffered from great and small incidents during that time. Let us keep bearing the good news about Easter and shine in the realms of regret, grief, darkness, and violence with the light of the risen Christ.

Today, I want to invite you to follow the trace of risen Jesus’s first week after His resurrection. After Jesus was risen, He prioritized to appear to His disciples and let them know that He conquered death and was resurrected. According to the Gospel of Mark, the risen Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9) and then appeared to two disciples who were not of Jesus’s twelve disciples and who were headed to a village called Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13). Jesus appeared to His disciples (or apostles) who hid themselves in Jerusalem (Mark 16:14-18). In the first week after He was resurrected, Jesus appeared to some chosen people who ate and drank with Him (Acts 10:41-42). Ironically, however, they did not recognize their Master, Rabbi, and Lord at first glance even though Jesus frequently taught them about His resurrection three days after His crucifixion. But when Jesus had time with them and shared a meal with the bread and cup, they opened their eyes and recognized their risen Lord. By the way, only one person among them, Thomas, who was one of Jesus’s twelve disciples, did not believe His resurrection until he touched the risen Jesus. Thus, Thomas came to have a nickname—“Doubting Thomas”—representing a man of little faith. Was he really a man of little faith? Is it fair to call him “Doubting Thomas?”

(2)

According to the Lectionary schedule, we read John 20:24-30. Among the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not describe anything about Thomas, except mentioning him in the listings of the disciples (Matthew 10:13; Mark 3:18; and Luke 6:15) while they fully describe some key disciples like Peter, James, and John. But thankfully, we can find some information about Thomas in the Gospel of John.

Thomas first appeared in the Gospel of John when Lazarus was dead. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus heard that His beloved friend Lazarus, who was a brother of Martha and Mary, became seriously sick. So, Jesus decided to visit and save him. But His disciples stopped Him from visiting Lazarus because the place—Bethany—where Lazarus lived was very close to Jerusalem (about 2 miles), and there were still Jews who were trying to stone Jesus. When other disciples stopped Jesus from visiting Bethany, Thomas appeared and said to them, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

Second, he appeared in the Gospel when Jesus finished the Last Supper and washed His disciples’ feet. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places...And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going” (14:2-4). Jesus thought that His disciples would know the way to the place where Jesus is going. But I believe nobody in the room understood what Jesus said. Breaking the silence, Thomas appeared and asked, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5).

Third, Thomas appeared in the Gospel when Jesus was risen. Jesus appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem, but Thomas was not there. So, some disciples came to Thomas and told him that they saw risen Jesus. But Thomas said, “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” (20:25).

Last, Thomas appeared in the Gospel when Jesus appeared to him. Jesus said to him, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (v. 27). And Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). These four stories are all about Thomas in the Gospels. Let me ask you again, “Was he really a man of little faith?” “Did he really touch the hands and the side of Jesus and then believe?” “Did Jesus really rebuke him and his little faith?”

(3)

Think about it! When an angel announced Jesus’s resurrection to Mary Magdalene, she first did not believe His resurrection until she saw the risen Jesus. When Mary Magdalene announced Jesus’s resurrection to Peter and some other disciples, they ran to Jesus’s tomb and confirmed that it was empty, but they did not believe His resurrection until they saw the risen Jesus. When they announced Jesus’s resurrection to the two disciples heading to Emmaus, they also did not believe His resurrection until they saw the risen Jesus. They all listened to the good news about Jesus’s resurrection, but they could not believe it. And their doubt finally turned into conviction when they saw the risen Jesus in person. In this sense, Thomas couldn’t believe the good news because he just heard about it and did not see the risen Jesus yet. Thus, Jesus’s words, “Do not doubt but believe” (v. 27), and His saying, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29), were not targeted Thomas alone but all in the room and in this sanctuary today.

(4)

Perhaps, Thomas may represent us. Just like Thomas, we tend to believe in Him when we see or experience Him. We seek the evidence of the risen Christ or the existence of God. And if we fail to find it, we might say, ‘There is no God!’ or ‘God is dead.’ Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” But we are still confined with a faith where “seeing is believing.” Just as Jesus came to doubting Thomas, so He constantly comes to doubting us. Just as Jesus came to and walked along with the two disciples heading for Emmaus, so He comes to us and walks along with us. But we still do not recognize Him until our eyes are opened. Just like Thomas, we could boldly say, “We may die with Jesus.” But when the real agony of life comes to us, we turn our back on Jesus, just as Thomas turned his back on Jesus when He was arrested and when He died on the cross. Thomas represents us, ordinary Christians who sometimes fall, who sometimes are tempted, and who sometimes turn our back on Jesus.

But ordinary Thomas, whom even authors of the Synoptic Gospels did not pay attention to, shows a way of Christian life to us—ordinary Christians. Thomas, who saw the marks of the nails on Jesus’s hands and His side, became a passionate believer of the risen Jesus Christ. According to Syrian Christian tradition, Thomas reached out to Babylon, Persia (today’s Iran), and India, proclaiming the good news about Jesus, founding churches there, and was martyred. You know that Saint Peter’s grave is under St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City. How about St. Thomas? Do you know where his grave is? It is under St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica in Chennai of India. Whether other disciples recognized him or not, whether authors of the Gospels recognized him or not, whether the people and the world recognized him or not, Thomas did his work. He delivered the good news about the risen Christ, founded churches, served the local people, and showed the life of Christians through himself until he returned to his eternal home and was reunited with his fellow disciples and his Master in the kingdom of heaven. Ordinary Christians! Let us live like the ordinary Thomas! Amen.