

THOMAS: THE MAN WHO MISSED EASTER

"Take eleven men hiding in fear, convince them that death cannot hurt them; and you have a formula for changing the world."

That assessment of the importance of Easter by a 20th century theologian is not an appeal to hope; it is a statement of fact. That's how the church began. With eleven men, now unafraid of death, empowered by the resurrection and by Pentecost to turn the world upside down in the name of Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord.

But for today's sermon, that's getting a bit ahead of our story. Today it's about Thomas one of those eleven disciples, the man who missed Easter. Thomas did finally get it. But, it wasn't immediate. And it wasn't all at once.

In fact, just about all we know for sure of Thomas is contained in four brief vignettes from the Gospel of John. We ran across two of them in the scripture text for this morning and there are two others to be found earlier in the Gospel. Let's look at each of them briefly to discover in their composite. A reluctant disciple who came through debilitating doubt and triumphant faith - a man who, if we are honest, we will discover is surprisingly contemporary with us.

I. The first vignette is from John 11 and there we see Thomas as the **HEROIC PESSIMIST** (John 11:1-16)

A. Situation in Bethany - It's easier for an optimist to be loyal - he expects the best. But in Thomas, hope had died

B. Nevertheless, loyalty was still ablaze. Loyalty could follow, even when it could not hope.

C. A similar hopeless loyalty is seen in the response of a New England rescue team which was called to an at-sea rescue in the midst of a severe storm. The boat crew objected that if they went out now, they might never come back. "Launch the boat," declared the Captain. "We have to go out! We don't have to come back, but we have to go out!!"

D. Jesus needs followers like that today. And those, be assured, who begin to follow Him in the darkness will surely find the light. But we must follow!

II. The second view of Thomas comes in the 14th chapter of John where we see him as the BEWILDERED QUESTIONER.

A. John 1:1-5 "The way ye know" - Jesus
"NO we don't know." - Thomas

B. Jesus "I am the way", verse 6.

C. Thomas is the man who could not have a question unasked - who sought an intellectual basis for his faith.

D. He took his question to the right source.
If we are sick we should go to a doctor;
If we have a legal problem we go to a lawyer;
If we have a faith question, who better to seek than Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 13:1)

III. The third snapshot of Thomas is from John 20, our text for today, where we see him as the INSISTENT SKEPTIC.

A. "Unless I see ... I will not believe."

B. Thomas could not take anyone else's word for what he himself had not experienced. He had no use for a second-hand faith.

C. But this is good. When "faith of our fathers" means it's dad's faith but not ours we're in trouble, because "God has NO GRANDCHILDREN!"

IV. Lastly, we journey with Thomas as he becomes the SURRENDERED DISCIPLE (John 20:27,28)

A. He missed Easter, but he made up for it. He came through debilitating doubt to triumph faith and became the surest man in Christendom.

B. Jesus shows Thomas his hands and his side. See Thomas - look - this was for you.

C. And Thomas fell at his feet and cried, my Lord and my God. Thomas had been reluctantly willing to die with Jesus before he was crucified. Now Jesus stood there speaking to him - only him - with visible proof that he had died for Thomas.

D. "My Lord". "My God".

CONCLUSION

That was the good news. But the really good news is that it wasn't only for Thomas. Did you hear the last verse in our text for today? Did you really hear it "Then Jesus told Thomas, because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed. Blessed are you, dear Christian friend. Blessed are you who have come to love him, and serve him and who celebrate with him today at his table. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.