

Sermon – April 24, 2022  
Pastor Dan Hollis  
John 20:24-29

“Doubting Thomas.” What a nickname for history to be remember you by.

The few times Thomas is mentioned in the Gospels, his major character flaw seems to be *pessimism*. But many of us who people might consider “pessimists” usually prefer to be called “realists,” right? See, Thomas was actually among the *first* to believe that Jesus wasn’t going to make it out of his ministry alive. The other disciples couldn’t imagine *anything* bad happening to Jesus, and they pictured the story ending with Jesus the triumphant Messiah bringing down the Roman Empire, liberating their people, and ruling over a new kingdom of God. But Thomas could see what was coming. If he had been alive at the time of Joan of Arc, or Martin Luther King, Jr., he would have predicted that *their* crusades for righteousness would end in their deaths, at the hands of a world that wasn’t ready for them. A world that would react to their messages with anger and fear.

Thomas had been the first to say that if we return with Jesus to Judea we will die with him. And he wasn’t far off. While in Judea, Jesus *was* put to death for his message... and in the years to come, many of his *disciples* met similar violent ends because they continued to follow him.

*Imagine* what it must have been like to be Thomas in those first few days after Jesus died. Jesus had been executed, brutally and long, as Thomas had predicted. The very “doubting” nature we remember him for had allowed him to see the only way Christ’s ministry was ever going to end... but despite his predictions, Thomas had failed to stop it, or even to *die* alongside his Master as he thought he would.

So Thomas went off by himself to mourn. He couldn’t bear to look at the other disciples, or feel their eyes on *him*. Sure, they had *all* failed, but Thomas had *known* it was coming. He needed to grieve—to process these complicated emotions—alone.

And that’s probably why he wasn’t there with the other disciples when the risen, resurrected Jesus walked into the room. The rest of the disciples were huddled together, locked inside. They were afraid Thomas was right, that the Romans wouldn’t stop at executing their *leader*, and might try to round *them* up next. And the risen Jesus walked in and told them, “Peace.” “Peace be with you.” He was alive. He wasn’t a ghost, or a hallucination based on false hope. He had within him God’s gift of new life. “Look, it’s me,” he seemed to say. “The same Jesus you always knew. The one who walked with you, who laughed and cried with you, who ate with you and burped with you and showed you a better way of life. It’s me, your friend, your teacher. See? Look at my skin. Look at my scars.”

Our scars are what make us human. All those things that remind us we're not perfect. The things that give us bumps and rough edges. Our *flaws* define us. Our imperfections. The mistakes we make, yes, *and* the crazy harebrained schemes we come up with. We thought up slapstick comedy and bungee jumping, and somewhere along the line we decided it was a good idea to try setting our food on fire. Some of the *best* moments in a relationship with another person are when we laugh at each other for something *stupid* we've done. Humans invented the pacemaker, the microwave oven, and the chocolate chip cookie *all* by messing up the things we were *actually* trying to do properly. The best poetry, the best artwork, they are *all* full of imperfections, and it's the imperfections that *make* them beautiful.

Yes, our human failings *are* the root of all the sins we commit against God, and all the evils we commit against one another... but our human failings are also the source of so much *beauty* and *worth*. I truly believe that. If we never made any mistakes, the world would be *such* a boring place, and more than that, we would never *learn* anything! And critically, we would never be able to *empathize* with those who *did* make mistakes.

I'm not saying that *every* mistake we make is beautiful and valuable and worthy of praise. Most of the *worst* things I've ever done, the things I regret *most* in my life, are because I made a mistake, or I fell short, or I made the wrong choice. And I should be dedicating my life to being *better*, and to keeping myself from *making* those mistakes ever again. But my flaws, the things that made me *capable* of failures like that, are also the same things that bring about such *meaning* in my life.

Which brings us back to "Doubting Thomas." 'Cause that *was* his flaw, right? He *doubted* that Jesus had returned from the dead, and *before* that he *doubted* that Jesus would make it out of Judea alive in the first place.

See, Jesus' friend *Lazarus* had died, and Jesus wanted to return to Judea to see his friend's body. Now all the *disciples* were *afraid*, because the authorities in Judea had been trying to *stone* Jesus, and they might very well *catch* the whole *lot* of them on their way to see Lazarus. But *Thomas* is the one that *convinces* them all to go *with* him. Like I said earlier, Thomas is a bit of a pessimist, and he says that if they go *with* Jesus they will likely *die* with him... but *despite* all that... he says they should go *anyway*. Yeah, same guy. Doubts and all.

Thomas showed incredible bravery and loyalty to Jesus by jumping right in alongside him without a second thought, even *more* so because of what he predicted could happen. Sure, he *doubted* they would make it out of there alive, but he had faith in Jesus all the same.

Thomas's flaws, the scars of doubt his pessimism left on his soul, were also what helped him start to understand what Jesus had been trying to tell the disciples all along: The Messiah they were imagining in their *optimism*, the one who would *fix* everything for them—make it all perfect in the blink of an eye, and send them off into a life of power and prosperity... *that* Messiah didn't exist. The world doesn't always work like that. *God* doesn't always work like that.

There was something important about Thomas's scars. And how did *Jesus* show the disciples he was still with them? Still one of them? ...By showing them his *own* scars.

And when Thomas—pessimistic Thomas, who didn't believe the disciples when they told him this amazing thing they had seen—when Thomas allowed himself to be dragged along to the house where the rest of them were hiding, and when the risen Jesus once again walked into the room and told them, "Peace be with you," what did he do with Thomas?

He showed him his scars.

Jesus had been resurrected. Given new life. A miracle. *Divinity*. And yet instead of proving to the disciples who he was by... creating a thunderstorm or firing beams of light out of his hands or lifting the house into the air with his mind... Jesus showed them *imperfection*.

The person standing before them was not this perfect, shining, immaculate new thing with great skin and rippling muscles and a fresh tan. His body still bore the marks of *this* life. It was not perfect. And the way that he showed the disciples that he was *still* one of them, that he was still the man they loved and followed... was by showing them his scars. Things that weren't perfect by any stretch.

Now in time it would become clear that Jesus wasn't going to remain in this world, or march at the vanguard of some crusade. He would soon return to Heaven, and leave this world in the hands of *us* flawed, imperfect, scarred humans. But he needed something from us all the same. He commissioned the disciples—made them *apostles*, granted them the Holy Spirit, and sent them out into the world to spread the teachings of Jesus and strive for a better world: a world of peace and love, of service and compassion, of liberation and empowerment and forgiveness. These messed up people. These people bearing their scars where everyone could see. Doubting Thomas, Denying Peter, Distracted Martha, Bigoted Nathaniel... Paul the Persecutor.

Jesus' message would never be taken to the world unless *people* took it, scars and all. In the centuries to come, *people* would be *mouths* to speak for Jesus, the *feet* to run his errands, and the *hands* to do his work.

Our flaws make us special. How else could someone like *me* end up behind a pulpit? My flaws brought me here. My scars brought me here. They gave me the ability to share the good news of God in my own way, to spread the teachings of Jesus, and to strive for the better world Christ asks of us... in a way only *I* can.

And that's what each of *you* have, too. That's what *all* of us have. Our flaws, our imperfections, our scars. Those things that make us human. That make us *interesting*. That allow us to see ourselves in others. That give us empathy, compassion, and humility. That keep things from getting boring, and that help us to *learn*, every day.

Those flaws, those scars, *can* lead us into the depths of sin... or they can *empower* us to do what Christ has called us to do: to be Christ's disciples, to be apostles to the world, to strive for a better tomorrow, to care for the children of God everywhere we encounter them, and to bring light to the darkness. Our lights aren't perfect, and they aren't all the same color... but how many great paintings can you think of that are only one color?

And so we strive to have as much faith as Thomas had. To have faith even when things are at their darkest, and to stride forward even when we *doubt* it will end well. To say with full conviction, "My Lord and my God," and to go forth on the mission Christ has charged us to, even if we're... pretty sure we're gonna mess it up along the way. And mess it up we will. But with great flaws comes great beauty.

So take whatever scars you bear, whatever imperfections you carry... take what is yours and share it with the world. Let us make our humanity the vehicle for doing the work of Divinity. Let us show the people we meet that we are one of them!

Just as Jesus showed the disciples his scars, let us meet our fellow humans, imperfection to imperfection, and let us muddle through this life together, as best we can.

*You* are an apostle of God. Called by God to do great things in this world. To bring the light and love of Jesus to everyone you meet. I don't care how messed up you think you are, or how many mistakes you've made, or that you don't think you're strong enough or worthy enough to carry that responsibility. You are an apostle of God. Receive the Holy Spirit. As God sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you.

Have faith. God has great plans for you.

Amen.