

Theme: Christmas promises kept  
Text: John 20:24-29

**<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”**

**But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”**

**<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”**

**<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

**<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

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The Word of God we’ll consider today is the Gospel from John chapter 20. Let’s begin with prayer:

*May we, O God, by grace believe and thus the risen Christ receive, whose raw imprinted palms reached out and beckoned Thomas from his doubt. Amen.*

We all know what’s coming this week – Christmas is almost here! And that of course means peace on earth, right?! After all that’s what the angels said to those shepherds of Bethlehem on that first Christmas so long ago. **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:14**

I’ve already received several Christmas cards that include the promise of peace at Christmas. We’ll sing so many songs that announce this peace too. You know them, right? *Sleep in heavenly peace... peace on earth and mercy mild... peace came to earth at last that chosen night... to God on high be glory and peace to all the earth.*

Peace on earth. Are we sure about that? Over 2,000 years have passed since that first Christmas and the Christmas promise of peace on earth sometimes seems pretty out of reach... for this world... even just for our own lives.

But you don’t need to fast forward to today to have such doubts about whether or not this Christmas promise of peace was kept or not... you can fast forward from that first Christmas about 33 years... to a locked room in Jerusalem... where God’s peace seemed as distant as ever from a man named Thomas.

Thomas was one of the 12 apostles of Jesus. And if you want an idea of what Thomas was like, think of a friend you might know who always says what everyone else is thinking, but is too afraid to say themselves. That was Thomas.

He was the disciple that wasn’t afraid to say what others had been thinking. When Jesus went to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead, the disciples were concerned because Lazarus’ home in Bethany was near Jerusalem and the leaders of Israel who lived there wanted to kill Jesus. And so, when Jesus says, “Let’s go!” What does Thomas say? **“Let’s go too, so that we may die with him.” John 11:16** Whether a bold statement of courage and loyalty or just a sign that Thomas was giving up and going

along with what seemed like a crazy trip... Thomas blurted out what was likely swirling around in the minds of others.

Or you can think about the night Jesus was arrested, the night before his death on the cross, when Jesus told his disciples that he was going away to prepare a place for them in his Father's house... Jesus looked at his puzzled disciples and said: **You know where I am going, and you know the way.**" And while the rest of the disciples sat there quietly, Thomas voiced what was on his mind and surely on the minds of at least some of his fellow disciples: **"Lord, we don't know where you are going," Thomas replied, "so how can we know the way?" John 14:4-5** I'm so thankful Thomas asked that question, because it led Jesus to one of the most clear and comforting statements he makes in his Word when he replied to Thomas saying: **"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." John 14:6**

Sometimes it's nice to have a person who is willing to say what others are thinking but are unwilling to say themselves. And after Jesus rose from the dead Thomas delivered again. Sure, his doubts and questions may have earned him the monicker of "doubting Thomas" – but that really isn't a fair nickname. Yes, he doubted, but so did the rest of the disciples. On Easter morning Peter and John ran to the tomb to see it for themselves not believing the report of the women. The other apostles were not rejoicing in but were discussing the reports from those who saw Jesus in Emmaus later that day. And remember, not a one of them remembered or believed what Jesus had told them very clearly and repeatedly about his resurrection prior to his death.

The point is, Thomas was just expressing the doubts that all the disciples had... including the doubts that many of us have faced at times when we've thought about Jesus and his resurrection.

Even for the most firm and faithful among us, there are moments of doubt when we wonder if all this good news about Jesus can really be trusted. We wonder how we can know if Christmas really matters... if Jesus actually lived and died. How we can know that there was something special about it. How we can know that death actually lost a battle with Jesus on Easter morning when all we ever see is death's dreadful perfect record in our world and in the lives of those we love.

When Thomas had such doubts, Jesus came to him and offered proof... and... peace. He showed him his hands and side that were pierced by nails on the cross. He talked with him and spoke not words of anger or judgment, but words that called Thomas back to faith and forgiveness once again as he said **"Peace be with you." John 20:26** And in that moment the peace on earth that was announced at Christmas came into crystal clear focus for Thomas and the other disciples. The peace Jesus came to bring was peace between sinners and a holy God through the forgiveness of sins earned by our Savior. And because Jesus died and rose again Thomas now had proof and peace that brought this reconciliation with God into his own heart.

Jesus does the same for us. He offers us proof and peace when doubts assail us. He comes to us in his Word and speaks pardon to our sin and faith to our uncertainty. And no, we were not there when Jesus appeared... we did not get to join the shepherds at the manger, or Mary at the cross, or Thomas in the presence of the risen Lord... so yes, we freely admit that our trust in a living Savior is a matter of faith. But it is not blind faith. It is not utterly foolish and irrational. Consider the many things that serve as witnesses to the validity of the resurrection.

God had made promises about a crucified and risen Savior many centuries before Jesus actually came and fulfilled those promises. We have actual copies of the Old Testament that were written before Jesus walked this earth that speak about these promises. And if it were just one or two predictions that Jesus just so happened to fulfill, I suppose you might chalk it up to coincidence, but we have dozens and dozens of things spoken before Jesus was born that he, and he alone, fulfilled in total. From a virgin birth in Bethlehem, to a ministry hailed by the desert prophet John, to the holy life he lived, and the miracles he performed, and his betrayal by a friend, and death on a cross, and burial in a rich man's grave, and yes all the way to the resurrection – Jesus did all these things that were foretold.

And we have A LOT of witnesses to this! Jesus appeared to more than just Thomas and the other apostles. He appeared to many of the women who followed him on Easter morning, he appeared to more disciples on the road to Emmaus, he appeared to his brother James, and as St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians **he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:6** And St. Paul's point in telling the Corinthians about this was so that they could go and check with the ones that were still alive and verify what they saw.

St. Paul of course himself was a powerful testimony that Jesus was alive, how else could a terrorist who sought the arrest and murder of Christians become a faithful missionary willing to die for the message he would proclaim about Jesus.

In fact the willingness of Paul and Thomas and the rest of Jesus' disciples to not only preach this message but to lose everything for it, including their health, their possessions, their freedom, and their very lives, it shows us this was not just the crazy notion of an individual or the conspiracy of those out for power, money, or fame. If one person tells a lie and creates a religion, he might just be delusional. But if you have dozens of people who do this, and they all suffer and die for this message and refuse to back down, it shows that there is something else going on.

According to church history St. Thomas himself faced such an end on this date, December 21, when he was put death by a spear in India after traveling east to spread the good news he had heard and seen about Jesus – the Savior of the world.

And all of these proofs, all of these eye witnesses, all of these written records which were meticulously preserved over thousands of years, they all speak to the same amazing truth: Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died and rose again. His death on the cross paid the price set to free us from sin's punishment of hell. His resurrection from the grave not only proves God the Father accepted this sacrifice, but it proves that he vindicated his holy Son, and offers resurrection and eternal life to all who believe in him. This is the peace Jesus came at Christmas to bring. And God, as he always does, kept his Word. Christmas promises kept. That's what the festival of St. Thomas reminds us of today.

Jesus is here with us today again on the doorstep of Christmas. He is here with words of pardon and peace in the Gospel message proclaimed. He is here with us, physically present in bread and wine, and offering us the chance today to touch his body and blood in Holy Communion so that we can have the same comfort Thomas had. Yes Jesus is here today, and he says to us, just as he said to Thomas long ago: **"Peace be with you."**

Friends, Jesus the Savior was born for you. He died for you. And he is alive! His Word declares it. And his Word is trustworthy because what it says always takes place. God always delivers on his Word. And so, we rejoice in the Christmas promises kept by Jesus and we trust the promise he makes to us today in his Word as he says to you and me: **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29** Amen.

**Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21**