

May 28, 2017 “This Is Just A Fraction” John 20:24-31

Thomas called Didymus, one of the twelve. This is his story. In the movie Sully, director, producer, Clint Eastwood brings before us one of the true life dramas of our time. Sully is an airline pilot. He took off from New York City and almost immediately lost both engines due to bird strike. There were a hundred and fifty people on board the aircraft. As Captain, Sully made the decision to land the plane on the Hudson River. It was a courageous decision made when the difference between life and death was measured in seconds. Sully’s choice and his skills as a pilot saved every last person on board that plane.

However, it is normal procedure for investigations to follow such events. Sully is believed to have said to his co-pilot as the investigation began... “I have been flying for 30 years and I am going to be judged for the rest of my life based on 208 seconds.” Thomas has been called Didymus ever since that fateful meeting in the upper room a week after the resurrection of Jesus occurred. Thomas the doubter. Doubting Thomas. Is he deserving of that title? Well, you need to know this going in...his faith in the risen Lord led Thomas to serve in Parthia, Persia and India. He suffered martyrdom, killed for his faith in Jesus, near Madras, at Mount St. Thomas.

There is no question that this event occurred. It gained Thomas a nick name that stuck for the remainder of

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history. He has become the perfect example of one who is stubborn, who demands proof. Who will not believe unless he has the chance to see and to touch the evidence for himself. As I said, it is a week after Easter. The Sunday evening following the resurrection of Jesus. John's testimony is sound. It is first hand. He saw what happened, and he heard the words that were exchanged. The other 10 surviving disciples were all present. The room was full of followers of Jesus. No one who was there ever took issue with John's description, least of all Thomas himself. We can trust the record.

But the story actually begins the week before. The disciples, possibly as many as 120 gathered in the upper room. Someone had a key. They locked the doors, there are two of them. They locked the doors because they were afraid of the Jews, their own kind. They were afraid that the Sanhedrin, the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem would find out that they were gathering there, as Jesus followers. That what happened to Jesus, would happen to them. They were afraid, and yet they sought company with each other. Cleopas and Luke arrived from Emmaus to share their testimony of seeing Jesus, risen from the dead. But before Cleopas and Luke ever got to speak Jesus appeared and was with HIS flock in the upper room. He

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blessed them. "Peace be with you..." for it was peace they lacked. And he showed them his wounds...his hands...his side.

It is a week later. Sunday evening and the marvel has begun. Followers of Jesus gathering together on the first day of the week...just like us. What is different is that this time the 11 are there. Thomas who did not show up last Sunday night, is there this time. And because Thomas was not with them when Jesus came among them the previous Sunday night they are telling him the story, they are sharing the experience. "We have seen the Lord." To which Thomas honestly replies, "I need proof. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side (that's how big the spear wound was) I will not believe." Thomas wants proof. Thomas wants to see and handle the evidence. From his point of view, he is being sensible, reasonable. He is a thoroughly modern man.

It is evening. The gathering is if anything larger than the week before. The word is out. He is risen. Now, that everyone is present the doors have once again been locked. People are on edge. Some are definitely frightened. Just being here, could have consequences. And once again Jesus stands among them. It is not a ghost. It is not primarily a spiritual experience. Jesus speaks, "Peace be with you." It is what they

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need. It is what they find elusive in the current atmosphere in Jerusalem. And Jesus goes to the heart of the matter of first business. “Thomas...put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

There is a case to be made that Jesus simply offered Thomas what HE had offered the room full of disciples the previous Sunday evening. It is a parallel experience to that of Easter night. The blessing of Peace. The offering of the physical evidence that makes the point HE is real and really risen. He offers Thomas what Thomas has said he needs. The chance to see. The opportunity to touch. The chance to be sensible. The chance to be rational. But Jesus makes the one demand God will always make of us. It is the one thing that He asked of Moses and the Israelites. It is the demand of the 1st commandment. Believe that I am the Lord your God who redeems you and sets you free.

And Thomas responds with that simple confession of faith, “My Lord and my God.” Two things. Thomas said it, according to John. John is sharing with us that everyone in the room is thinking it. These appearances of the risen Christ have that affect. They galvanize faith. They make faith a real experience. They cause people to see with their eyes that there

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can be no denying Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus and the Father pour forth the Spirit of God into the midst of a gathering of believers.

I said Two Things. And the second is just important as the first. As surely as Thomas and the rest of the people in the room find themselves believing in Jesus, according HIM the faith that is only rightly given to the living God of Israel, is this second truth. Jesus received that act of worship and devotion. HE received that acknowledgement of divinity. You should underline this in your Bibles at home. This bit of Scripture is not about what John said, or even about what Thomas said. It is about Jesus response to the profession. "My Lord and My God." Jesus receives this acknowledgement of HIS real nature. And Jesus builds on it.

Jesus goes on to say, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." That statement is about you and I and all the generations of followers of Jesus who worship HIM and follow HIM as Lord and God. This relationship in which we stand and live, at times strong, and times very weak...is always going to be about one thing. Belonging to Jesus is about faith...faith in the living God who has revealed Himself to be Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

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We cannot leave this chapter of John without acknowledging what John does go on to say. “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of HIS disciples, which are not recorded in this book.” This account is just a fraction of the God revealing things that Jesus did. This is not a complete recording even of the resurrection appearances...and by the way we are not done with them. Everything we have, however, in print, is but a fraction of what the disciples experienced.

And finally...this must be said. We are Presbyterian Christians. We have a tendency to want proof, especially Biblical proof, of what God has done, and what God will do. We tend to want to see. We tend to want to touch. We want the rational goods about Jesus. We want the faith we share to make sense, to be sensible, reasonable, and rational. But we also need to remember, our Christian journey is never going to be so sensible, so reasonable, so rational that it will not require a fundamental act of faith. Thomas defines it. Looking at Jesus, as we read about Jesus, hear about Jesus, the basic requirement will be...a profession of faith...My Lord and my God!” Submission to the reality of divinity.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, God revealing Son, we are tempted to believe that we have high standards. We demand leadership

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that is extremely well schooled, that demonstrates an understanding of how the world really works. You remind us in the upper room experience with Thomas that there is something just as significant and ultimately more important. You are Lord and God. Lead us in the way of faith and faithfulness. Give us light that will help us to submit to your high and holy will in all things. In Jesus name we pray. Amen