

April 24th Sermon: Defining Moment: When Peace Comes through Doubt by Pastor Jenn

Scripture Lesson: John 20:19-31

If you or someone you know are in need of picking out a child's name, or if you enjoy *onomatology*, that is, the study of names, I suggest you go to <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/decades/century.html>. It is the neatest website on names. On there you can look up an array of names as well as check out the most popular names for any year in this country beginning in 1909 to 2020, which is the most recent information they have.

And when you look at that this list you will realize that while we are a diverse country, we are all drawn to common names for the next generation. This is the list of the most popular boys' names since 1909 notice there are only 8 names that are used: John 1909-1923; Robert 1924-1939; James 1940-1952; Robert 1953; Michael 1954-1959; David 1960; Michael 1961-1998; Jacob 1998-2012; Noah 2013-2016; Liam 2017-2020.

For girl are 11 names: Mary 1909-1946; Linda 1947-1952; Mary 1953-1961; Lisa 1962-1969; Jennifer 1970-1984 (which explains why there were always at least 2 other Jennifer's in class with me); Jessica 1985-1990; Ashley 1991-1992; Jessica 1993-1995; Emily 1996-2007; Emma 2008; Isabella 2009-2010; Sophia 2011-2013; Emma 2014-2018; Olivia 2019-2020.

But that's not all you'll see on this website. If you have a name in particular that you want to check out how popular it is, you type it in and see where it ranks from 1 to 1000. I checked out my own name to see how it was doing and while in 2000 it seemed to be making a comeback ranking at 26. By 2020 it was 434.

My husband's name, Scott, which is also my brother's name, in 1963 when my husband Scott was born it was ranked number 12, today it's ranked 563.

Finally, I thought I'd check out some names that have negative aspects and see how they rank. Adolf is not in the top 1000 male names for any year of birth in the last 80 years. Neither is Judas. And poor Thomas is slowly fading away.¹

We hold certain thoughts and feelings toward names, don't we? Especially if there is a story behind them. When the church lectionary calls on pastors to preach this text from John, we are always drawn to Thomas and right away we think to ourselves, ah ha! Doubting Thomas. I think Thomas has gotten a bad rap through the years. *So has doubt.*

There is an old Iranian Proverb that says, "Doubt is the Key to Knowledge". In all honesty, Thomas was seeking knowledge, trying to comprehend it all, verifying that Jesus was not a ghost, this was a resurrected body, this was his Lord.

He wasn't the only one struggling with that doubt. Remember the text prior to this one? On that very first Easter morning, Jesus comes to Mary and tells her to share the news that he has risen from the dead. She shares it with the disciples, but at the beginning of this text, we pick up on their unbelief of what she said. Because where are the disciples? Locked up in a room. Until Jesus comes into the room, speaks a word of peace, and then we read in verse ²⁰*After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.* The disciples had to see, had to have proof to believe what Mary had already told them. Yet we hold Thomas as the one with doubt.

So, let's go back a little in this gospel prior to this scene and see if Thomas really deserves the title Doubting Thomas.

In John 11:16 Jesus tells his disciples they are going back to Judea for ministry, but the disciples are not happy about this because the last time they were there, the people tried to stone Jesus. So, the disciples tell Jesus they do not want to go there again, except in verse 16 we read, ¹⁶*Thomas, who was called the Twin, * said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'* Seems to me, Thomas definitely had courage in this text, even a willingness to die. Why don't we remember him as *Courageous Thomas*?

Then in John 14, Jesus is having his last supper with his friends, he is preparing his disciples for his death, using some beautiful but confusing language. He says, *'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe* in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? * ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I*

am going. ⁵Do you remember that it is Thomas who is so attentive to what Jesus is saying at the last supper about his leaving that Thomas says, *'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'* ⁶Jesus said to him, *'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.'* It took some honesty for Thomas to acknowledge he didn't understand what Jesus was saying, yet he knew he wanted to understand. *So why not call him Honest Thomas? Or Curious Thomas?*

That's what I think is going on in the text today, Thomas just wanted some clarification, he wanted to see, to touch. He was curious. And there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, Jesus is *not* upset with his doubt, nor the doubt of the other disciples. The way we know that is, when the risen Lord comes to them, he doesn't chastise them for their unbelief, no he simply gives them peace.

Look at our passage, verse, *19* When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, *'Peace be with you.'* ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, *'Peace be with you. He didn't say, "I am so disappointed in you and your lack of faith", He says, "Peace" "Peace be with you"*

This is the same peace he offers Thomas when he comes back to visit Thomas. The text says that *"his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'* ²⁷*Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'* ²⁸*Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'* *Twice* In this passage, Jesus offers peace to those in doubt, and why the risen Lord does that is because *doubt has its place with faith.*

St. Augustine wrote, *"A man doubts, therefore God is"* It is doubt that drives us to seek answers to something we question. And God wants us to do that, to seek knowledge and understanding, regarding our faith.

The Bible is filled with people who had doubt and with that doubt it led them to a further understanding of God, and that lead them to a faith that could handle an array of personal and communal issues. Abraham and Sarah had doubts, so did Jacob. Moses had doubts and so did Gideon. Jonah had his doubts, and so did Elijah, as well as the disciples of Jesus. For most doubt is simply part of the faith journey. So, we shouldn't suppress our doubts, they can open our faith in ways it has never been opened before.

Doubt has its place with faith. And the good news we receive today is this defining moment; Jesus meets us in our doubts with peace because it is peace that prepares us to receive the truth. Go to the text again and *after receiving the Peace*, when Thomas sees the proof in the hands and feet of Jesus, he exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus brought peace, to his doubt, *not judgment*, and that lead Thomas to the profession of his faith.

When it comes down to it, we are good at placing certain thoughts and feelings toward names. And while many refer to this gospel passage as the passage that transforms the good name of Thomas into the negative title, *Doubting Thomas*, the point of this text *is not Thomas*, the focus of this Scripture is a name above all names, it is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

He has risen from the dead, and he is here to help us grow in our belief, help us establish another defining moment of this faith, he will help us grow as his disciples, by his peace.

Let us pray: God, we believe. Help us in our unbelief. Help us reach out and touch the hand of your Son, to find your hope upheld by his peace. Amen.