

**All Saints Episcopal Church Steenrijk,
Chapel of the Resurrection
Willemstad, Curacao**

2 Easter (A)

April 16, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Certainty”

DRAFT

**The Holy Gospel
according to John 20:19-31**

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.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven

them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later 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.” 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.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that

through believing you may have life in his name.

Keep us as the apple of your eye, and the sheep of your pasture, and in the palm of your mighty hand, O Lord, our Savior, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Of all the twelve apostles, tradition says Thomas took the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the farthest reaches of the civilized world, farther than any other of Jesus' disciples: St. Thomas went all the way to India, according to well-known

traditions. Thomas had a strong faith, apparently stronger and beyond that of all the other disciples in how far he would take the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth in the First Century. However, Thomas' initial missionary launch was a bit shaky, not believing what the other Eleven disciples had told him, that Christ had appeared to them personally on the first Easter evening. Thomas was absent on that first Easter evening, and when he heard the others proclaim Jesus had risen from the dead, Thomas would have none of it.

Thomas wanted to see for himself, and Jesus uses Thomas as a model, a foil, for how we are not to ask for proof of Christ's resurrection, but we are to believe what other Christians are telling us. We are not to set ourselves up as being the standard of truth, but we are to trust the truth telling of other Christians in forming our own faith. Yet, we tend to be somewhat hard-headed like Thomas, wanting our own way, wanting our own personal proof, wanting things done 'our way' or else we will not have faith.

Proof in scientific terms is something which is ‘probability related’. What is the probability that an event will or has occurred or is occurring? Social sciences tend to use probabilities of about eighty percent to make judgments about human behavior; the biological and physical sciences tend to go further, to say ninety or especially ninety-five percent probability, to determine actual ‘truth’ in the eyes of those sciences. Physics and astronomy tend to use even higher criteria for ‘truth’; and mathematics will generally acquiesce to only extremely

small ‘approximations’ to solve problems. But all sciences fall short of the one hundred percent certainty.

Thus, when we rely on a scientist to tell us what is truth, they will be using whatever criteria that their particular science tends to accept as ‘fact’. But absolute certainty is actually not achievable; the name for such uncertainty is called the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, that anything which is ‘pinned down’ as to its location can never be ‘pinned down’ as far as its direction of movement is concerned; and,

vice versa: if anything's movement is precisely known, its current position is precisely unknown, to take the Heisenberg Principle to its extreme. Human knowledge is never absolute as a result.

That we can assume Thomas is behaving as a scientist is perhaps stretching the facts we know about him a bit much, but Thomas in a way foreshadows the current age of science which seems always in contest with statements of faith. And Jesus uses Thomas as an example of how far we

cannot, or perhaps should not, test faith. We need to rely on responsible faithful people to guide us into the way of truth.

I recall in my college physics class that our professor said that we have come to the point in science when we can no longer ‘draw pictures’ of what we believe to be true. Later in graduate school, I learned that mathematical equations are the only useful way of describing the atom; we cannot draw any accurate picture of an atom, as we once thought we could. An atom is actually the solution of complex differential

equations, which often are insoluble with our present mathematical abilities. A two-body solution is about the only thing we can be reasonably certain of; the three body equation still escapes us except as an approximation; and in fact, the two body solution makes assumptions which are not absolutely precisely correct, but give a result that can be tested and found to be a very good or maybe even an excellent representation of reality. But reality itself is not something anyone can solve

mathematically, and thus reality itself is always some approximation of truth.

Take the observation of the resurrected body of Jesus: how can a solid human resurrected body which can cook and eat fish also pass through closed doors as we hear in today's Gospel reading? Yet, physics 'knows' that all matter has more space than solids in it; so 'theoretically' even two solids can pass directly through each other; and we would have to acknowledge even 'scientifically' that Jesus could somehow pass through a closed door and not

negate all the laws of particle physics. In probability theory, Jesus was always both inside the room and outside the room. Even science would have to acknowledge that today's Gospel lesson is not impossible, odd though that sounds. But of course, we live our lives with the high expectation that usually solid objects cannot pass through each other.

We Twenty-first century people live in a time when we no longer have to think of our universe as being 'infinitely large'; the Hubble telescope can detect

that the farthest galaxies above and below us are less than about a hundred billion light years from us in either direction, and that thus the universe itself is ‘only’ about two hundred billion light years ‘wide’, even though it is continuing to expand. Some say it is perhaps three times larger than that, but few now say the universe is ‘infinite’.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universe>

Extrapolating back from the edges of the universe brings us to about fourteen billion years ago when the ‘Big Bang’

happened that created everything in our universe.

Thus, as far as any physical measurements can be made, the universe is all we can ‘know’ or measure.

Outside of our universe, only faith can show us the way. That is the principle that Thomas was faltering on, in ‘Twenty-first Century’ terms. The known universe is thus not ‘all’; the universe as we experience it is only manipulatable as far as its boundaries reach. And beyond our universe we have only faith to guide us. But that is what

Jesus came to do, to encourage us to think beyond whatever we can see and measure; and ‘thinking beyond’ what we can see of measure is another way of saying we need to have ‘faith’, faith that our God who put all this universe in order fourteen billion years ago has not forgotten us, and indeed that not only has God not forgotten us, God considers us human beings so unique that God sent his only Son to come into our universe as an authentic human being to help us have a sense of what God is all about. Our Holy God who made the universe and all

that is within it, our Holy God has not let us swim in the reaches of far outer space without coming to give us a way to reach our God who is outside of our measurable universe. God is far greater than the universe God made, is another way to put it.

Still on this day, the Second Sunday of Easter, we find that those who could be encouraged to hear the Easter story were perhaps only slightly if at all convinced a week later; and next year maybe they will again make the pilgrimage back to church to hear the

miracle of Easter once again. Will it change their lives, we cannot tell, but our task today is to allow the Easter moment to change our own lives. Our lives are what matter; however, Jesus gave us the power to forgive or retain sins--what a power that is. This puts a such a great burden on us that no one can possibly bear without the intervening of God's Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit which gave us breath; it is God's Holy Spirit which gives us life; we are living proof that inanimate matter can be molded into human beings who can sense and

worship God. We are the amazing invention of God who is always above and beyond all that we can or ever will be able to observe. This is the God whose earthly Son the apostle Thomas called “my Lord and my God”.

This knowledge is far beyond our understanding; this knowledge of the living God who gives life and sustains us even in death is the God whom we proclaim raised his Son from the cruel grave and who gave us such a forgiveness that we can transcend the laws of this universe and be able to be

with him in eternity. Jesus Christ is indeed our Lord and our God. Come, let us worship and adore him. Amen.

Description:

Jesus' disciple Thomas was the foreshadowing of the scientific age we live in today. We have certainties which are actually only probabilities, in mathematical terms. However, we Twenty-first Century people are now aware that the universe that can be seen and measured is finite and has limits. Outside of this universe we have only God and God's only Son, our Messiah, Jesus Christ in whom we live and move and have our being.

Tags:

Science, mathematics, social, physics,
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St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church

33 Railroad Avenue

Center Moriches, New York 11934

The Second Sunday of Easter (C)

April 27, 2014

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

John 20:19-31

Keep us as the apple of your eye, and
the sheep of your pasture, and in the

palm of your mighty hand, Our Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. Amen.

Ancient historic records indicate that St. Thomas the Apostle, based on a casting of lots by the twelve apostles, was sent with St. Bartholomew to evangelize Parthia in around 52 AD, and he brought Christian influence to a region which goes from eastern Syria, through Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan to India. He is thought to have been martyred about twenty years later in about 72 AD in Madras, India, after

having completed at least two long missionary journeys to this region. The Gospel of John which we read today was probably written some twenty years after Thomas' martyrdom. St. Gregory of Tours (who died in 594 AD) wrote:

“Thomas the Apostle, according to the narrative of his martyrdom, is stated to have suffered [death] in India. His holy remains (corpus), after a long interval of time, were removed to the city of Edessa in Syria and there interred. In that part of India where they first rested, stand a monastery and a church of striking

dimensions, elaborately adorned and designed.” The Spanish nun Egeria made a pilgrimage to Edessa in around 380 AD and wrote to her community in her still existent record of her travels: “we arrived at Edessa in the Name of Christ our God, and, on our arrival, we straightway repaired to the church and memorial of Saint Thomas. There, according to custom, prayers were made and the other things that were customary in the holy places were done; we read also some things concerning Saint Thomas himself. The church there is

very great, very beautiful and of new construction, well worthy to be the house of God, and as there was much that I desired to see, it was necessary for me to make a three days' stay there.” Edessa, Syria, was the capital of the great Parthian empire that stretched all the way to India, so it apparently was a natural place to return the relics of the famous evangelist Thomas back from its Indian territory.

To this day the Church of South India ascribes its founding to St. Thomas, and its claims go very far back in history.

So however inauspiciously Thomas may have begun his apostleship under Christ, historians ancient and modern believe his end resulted in the most eastward planting of Christianity of any of Jesus' apostles in the first century. There seems no question as to how Thomas' acclamation of seeing the risen crucified Lord, "My Lord and my God!" moved his heart with great evangelistic fervor.

John Westerhoff in his book, "Will Our Children Have Faith?" says he sees several stages of faith. The first is when

we are in preschool and during early childhood. This kind of faith may be called “mimicked” faith, when we are imitating what we are being taught without understanding the meaning of all the words. Then there comes the second stage which might be called “imitative” faith. At this stage during childhood and early adolescence we are intent on belonging to a group, and our faith still centers around imitating what the group does. Then we reach late adolescence and begin asking questions, trying to add our head to the heart of earlier stages.

Westerhoff calls this stage of faith, “searching” faith. Here we are prone to stumble; many drop out, and this is the time when cults recruit most of their members. The next stage of faith reached by adults is called “owned” faith. After questioning, hopefully one discovers a Christian answer that declares, “This is what I believe.” And I think there is at least a fifth stage of faith, the “owned” faith. How we live out our faith in our day to day lives, how we understand the ups and downs of life, how we cope with the unexpected

traumas and challenges becomes this stage of faith. But oftentimes we find our “owned” faith is insufficient to meet the needs of daily struggles. How we cope depends on how we put our faith to work and really live it. So, the final stage of faith is what I might call, “experienced” faith, faith that has been honed by our life experiences.

“Experienced” faith is a faith that is durable; it has been tested and found to uphold us in the most trying of circumstances. It is the faith of our Christian grandparents and great

grandparents. But “experienced” faith is not so easy to obtain, nor is it found quickly in life. Many of us seniors are in that phase of life when the tests become intense as we face the final decade or decades of life, and it is our “experienced” faith that carries us on to the end.

Theologian Paul Tillich said, “The old faith must die, eaten away by doubts, but only so that a new and deeper faith may be born.”

Some have noted that the fact that Jesus did not appear to Thomas while he

was away from the rest is evidence that Jesus' appearances are not just "wish-fulfillment." Surely Thomas is strong in his desire to encounter Jesus firsthand. But it is the assembly who sees the resurrected Christ. And Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord was also one of surprise, not an expected event in her mind. Mary Magdalene thought Jesus was the gardener, so she was not simply consciously wishing a mirage of Jesus to appear to her. Jesus' appearances are not wished appearances, fulfilling

expectations. Jesus comes and goes as he wills. Yet he is able to hear Thomas' objections to the eyewitness of the others even though Jesus was not actually physically present when Thomas emphasized he wanted tactile or touching proof of the risen Lord.

Some skepticism is absolutely necessary for a safe life. The theologian Paul Tillich said that doubt is not the opposite of belief, but without doubt, belief is not possible. Healthy doubt in fact leads us to faith. As we encounter the risen Christ ourselves in our day to

day lives, as we live miracle-filled existences, when those things we need to go OK do go OK, then we realize how blessed we are in our faith. But the glib assumption that all will be well regardless of what we do or say or pray, then we run into serious difficulties. Our world of cards soon tumbles down, and we are left with the empty hull of our forgotten faith.

Faith must be nurtured, practiced, experienced, and witnessed to be alive and well. The less we speak of our faith the worse off we will be when the going

gets rough. We need to train as hard as or harder than Olympic athletes by doing daily Bible reading, regular prayer, telling others about our faith--even if that is only saying we went to thus and so church Sunday. Tell someone who is willing to listen why our church experience was so uplifting and suggest they join you next week. When we tell others about our faith, our faith actually becomes stronger. One cannot “wear out” faith by exercising it. Faith is like a muscle that atrophies if not used, but

which gets stronger the more we do use it.

Thomas, the brave one, Thomas became a warning to all of us who live in the time when Jesus can only be known by the oral and written word. We will not be able to put out our hand and see his wounded hand. We will not be able to put our hand in his wounded side. We must believe on the basis of what we hear, read, and experience spiritually. As we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we come perhaps closest to

putting out our hands toward our risen and redeeming Savior.

Alexander White, one of Scotland's greatest preachers, saw a distinguished scientist appear in his congregation week after week, so much so that Reverend White began writing carefully constructed sermons which he thought would appeal to a scientific mind.

Finally, one day the scientist asked to become affiliated with Reverend White's church. When the Reverend asked the man why he had made his decision, the scientist told him the following story: on

the way out of church one day, an elderly lady asked him if he were planning to join the church. To which the scientist replied that he was “thinking about becoming a Christian.” To which the matron replied, “Oh, do come in further than that! Jesus Christ means the world to me.” The scientist said that her “radiant face and shining eyes” convinced him that “I knew that she had a secret which I did not have, and I wanted that secret with all my heart.”

University of Chicago former President Harper told a student once,

‘become a Christian and settle the doubts afterwards.’

Faith is not wishful thinking, forced illusion, or a set of intellectual ideas. Faith is simply a relationship with God, a relationship with tremendous significance for the individual concerned. But God cares for us in the little ways as well as for those imponderable issues of our life’s journey. One theologian commented that if you know how to laugh you know how to pray. Heartfelt prayer is spontaneous and natural.

I still recall the brilliant red flower that sprung up outside the room where my father died a tragic death in a cold early February in 1973. And someone else told me of the yellow tulips that began to bloom in mid-winter in the outdoor flower boxes on her mother's apartment patio in Europe on the day her mother died. So unexplained things do and have happened. Resurrection just happens to be the one individual thing that has only occurred to a single person in all of history. And it the memories of over five hundred eyewitnesses of the

risen Lord who have convinced us Christians of that fact. We do live a demonstrable faith. It is not imagined. Hundreds upon hundreds witnessed the physical truth of the resurrection of Christ after that first Easter.

Jesus keeps showing up. As he came back a week later for Thomas, Jesus keeps coming back week after week among his gathered disciples here -- in the word, the bread, and the wine -- not wanting any to miss out on the life and peace he gives. And he keeps sending us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a

world that, like us, so desperately needs his gifts of life and peace.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

A main character in the play, “St. Joan of Ark,” asks, “Must ... a Christ be crucified in every generation to save those who have no imagination?” Must

we see in order to believe, or can we accept the witness of those who have gone before us?

The Gospel of Luke comforts us in our time of questioning-- ‘ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ We need to bring our questions to God through our prayers, and the Holy Spirit’s presence to us as counselor and comforter will be present to give us the much needed rest from our inquiring spirit.

Faith is not wishful thinking, forced illusion, or a set of intellectual ideas. Faith is simply a relationship with God, a relationship with tremendous significance for the individual concerned. But God cares for us in the little ways as well as for those imponderable issues of our life's journey. One theologian commented that if you know how to laugh you know how to pray. Heartfelt prayer is spontaneous and natural.

Corri Ten Boom, who survived a Nazi prison camp, told the story of how, as a child, she went to her father and said, "Papa, I don't think I have the faith that some people have to face trouble." Corrie Ten Boom's father looked at her tenderly and said, "Corrie, dear, when your father says he will send you to the store tomorrow, does he give you the money today? No, he gives it to you when you are ready to go to the store. And if you are going on a train trip and need money for a ticket, does your father give you the money when we decide you

may take the trip? No. He gives it to you when you are at the depot, all ready to buy your ticket. Corrie, God treats us the same way. [God] doesn't give you the faith until you need it. When you do need it, [God] will certainly give it to you."

A New Yorker magazine cartoon about 15 years ago showed a large door, locked three times with heavy bolts, reinforced by a sturdy chain. And just to make sure that nothing could invade the formidable fortress, a long bar was

securely fastened across the door frame. And yet, upon close examination of the picture, it was clear that someone had managed to slip a Valentine under the door.

God is trying to slip more than a Valentine under our door of disbelief. God is earnestly calling us to unbolt the door of our hearts and let God come in. God's Son is patiently knocking, but the latch is on the inside where we control it. Will we let God in?

Few people have such a moniker firmly on their shoulders like the apostle Thomas.

“Doubting” seems to be synonymous with his name. Thomas was a ‘modern man’ who will only believe what he sees.

However, a poll of 1,546 Americans taken by the Yankelovich organization for “Life” magazine in the year 2000 found that 43 percent of Americans believe UFO’s are real. Thirty percent believe intelligent beings have visited earth. But only 7 percent say they have had an encounter with beings from

another planet or knew someone who had had an encounter with beings from another planet, and only 6 percent claim to have personally seen a UFO; in other words, seven times more believe in UFO's than claim to have seen them or who know people who have seen UFO's. I wonder who today might be in that 43 percent of UFO believers; and I really puzzle about who are in that 7 percent who have encountered beings from another planet or who know someone who has.

Oswald Chambers said, “Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong; it may be a sign that he is thinking.”

I heard somewhere that more Americans believe that Elvis is alive than believe that Jesus rose from the dead. I am amazed. My next question would be, how many of those who think Elvis is alive have also seen a visitor from outer space?

However, I still recall the brilliant red flower that sprung up outside the room where my father died a tragic death in a

cold early February. And someone else told me of the yellow tulips that began to bloom in mid-winter in the outdoor flower boxes on her mother's apartment patio in Europe. So unexplained things do and have happened. Resurrection just happens to be the one individual thing that has only occurred to a single person in all of history. And it the memories of over five hundred eyewitnesses of the risen Lord who have convinced us Christians of that fact. We do live a demonstrable faith. It is not imagined. Hundreds upon hundreds witnessed the

physical truth of the resurrection of Christ after that first Easter.

These resurrection appearance stories are said to have been recorded in part to counteract the lies and disinformation being spread by a sect of people called the “Docetists”. The Docetists claimed that Jesus was not a real physical person and thus could not have died in the first place but instead said Jesus was only a spiritual being. I think I may have grown up in the company of Docetists in a way. We never considered many of the physical issues surrounding the

resurrection or our day-to-day faith. The physical needs of others, the plight of the poor.

Poor Thomas—he gets labeled as the doubter. But in gospel of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verse 17, it reads, “...but some doubted.” An inspection of the original Greek text of Matthew indicates those words could also literally be translated, “...but these doubted,” referring to all the disciples that had gone to see the resurrected Lord in Galilee. So, it seems that the “doubting”

label that Thomas has been given could really fall upon all the disciples in that house where they huddled in fear. If they all had believed in Jesus' resurrection, then why was there a need for the risen Lord to appear to them? Why did Jesus come to his timid band of followers in that house, perhaps in the same upper room where Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper? The answer is only that Jesus did appear to them. And indeed for us who follow those disciples as our guides, it surely was good that Jesus did appear to them. For

one thing, Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit on those disciples, empowering them a week later to at least loosen the locks they had locked on the house door.

The next Sunday the doors were only “closed” but not “locked.” So, some progress had been made, except for the one who had been absent on the evening of the first Easter, Thomas. For Thomas seeing was necessary for believing.

Thomas could not take the witness of the others. Thomas had to see for himself.

And as if by telepathy, Jesus hears

Thomas’ request and appears to him with

the others on the first Sunday after Easter, the Sunday represented by today in our liturgical calendar—we call it the Second Sunday of Easter, the second Sunday in the season of Easter.

How would we have reacted to Jesus' resurrection? Would we be as believing as the Beloved Disciple who ran to see the empty tomb on Easter morning, and seeing the empty tomb, believed? Peter, the other disciple who ran to the tomb on Easter morning, Peter went inside the empty tomb and remained puzzled. And Peter was cowering like the rest in that

locked house on the evening of Easter. Peter still had not believed, nor had the rest of the disciples. Their years of discipling with Jesus had not brought to mind what Jesus had told them about his dying, to be followed three days later by his living again. The disciples were still caught up in dismay and disbelief that their wonderful Master had been murdered. And they probably felt the same fate was just around the corner for them as well. They feared death, they feared the death that their risen Lord would show them was not to be feared.

How far does our own faith take us along the journey towards no longer fearing death? Are we also in denial that we too must one day die? Is death the driving force in our life? Do we live so cautiously that our life even seems like death at times?

The challenge that we modern day Christians face is much like that of those disciples in that locked house on Easter evening. We see the possibility of discipleship, but we feel too weak to carry out what we know is our calling to be the twenty-first century disciples of

Jesus. We hesitate to share our faith with others. Maybe we never share our faith. Our friends would think us ‘odd’ if we did that we rationalize. But if we do not tell others about our faith, are we no better off than those vineyard keepers we heard about the other Sunday who refused to give the owner of the vineyard what produce he deserved. In other words, whom are we serving, ourselves or the King of the Universe and Beyond?

Today is the fifty-first Sunday before Easter, or at least several who were here

last week interpret it that way! It is also often called “Doubting Thomas” Sunday. But Lindy Black calls it “Honest Thomas” Sunday, since Thomas honestly expressed his misgivings about a Savior who could survive the crucifixion, thinking his other comrades were perhaps hallucinating when they told him they had seen the Risen Christ in their midst. Thomas was a scientist; he demanded proof.

I can recall several years ago the postulated existence of “black holes” in the universe, where light and matter

could not escape, but no one had observed them so many if not most scientists scoffed at the idea. But indeed, fairly recently it has been observed that at the near center of almost all galaxies there is a black hole, drawing light and matter into its clutches; thus there are hundreds of millions of black holes in the known universe. [The most recent observation is of a “escaped” black hole that is currently wandering around the universe – April 2023.]

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to heaven on the same day. And we have this phenomenon of Christ apparently coming and going up and down from heaven. He is first not there in the locked room, but then he is there, on two separate occasions, the two Sundays following the crucifixion. The Ascension spoken about in the Gospel according to Luke which took place some forty days after the resurrection does not exist per se in John's gospel. And the giving of the Holy Spirit in the

book of Acts does not happen fifty days after the resurrection in John's gospel, but the giving of the Holy Spirit is done immediately on the day Christ resurrected. So if we are confused by the two threads of stories it is because there are apparently two separate trains of faith stories in the gospels; the Johannine group who authored the gospel according to John was probably a Jerusalem-centered group, also scattered by the overthrow of Jerusalem in 70 AD; whereas the Markan group was a more Galilean centered group, and the

resurrection appearance they allude to is centered in Galilee; Matthew's gospel who used the Markan framework follows Mark's gospel in its accounts and thus is also Galilee centered. Yet, Luke's gospel that usually follows the Markan framework diverges in the resurrection story to follow more the Johannine record [but current 2023 scholarship contends that Luke was the last written gospel, about 120 AD]. How to reconcile the two threads of stories is a bit difficult, to say the least. But perhaps it is best to leave the two traditions as

being unique unto themselves, simply two separately recorded traditions that captured two separate accounts of the Risen Christ.

So, if that fact shakes us, we now are also doubters, and we join the ranks of Thomas who was uncertain about any of the stories others told about a man rising from the dead. And, 'Bah, humbug' could be our motto, along with Scrooge, and Thomas.

When the blind Helen Keller was asked if there were anything worse than

being blind, she responded, “Oh, yes, there is something worse than being blind. It is being able to see and not having any vision.” Or as the wise saying has it, there are none so blind as those who will not see.

In a UNESCO report, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, P. Sainath, who teaches at Bombay India’s Sophia Polytechnic Institute, reported that 1,826 people, mainly farmers with very small holdings of two acres or less, committed

suicide in India between 1997 and 2000 mainly because they were too burdened by debt and unable to feed their families in spite of the fact that India had 45 millions tons of unsold excess stock of grain.

<http://www.unesco.org/courier/2001_06/uk/medias.htm> .

As a scientist, which I eventually became during graduate school, I learned that one can only determine the probability of this or that. One cannot really "know" anything with absolute

certainty. Or if we do know something with absolute certainty, then our knowledge is not generalizable. That is called the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. If we know exactly something, then we have no idea of how it will change a moment later.

Everything is uncertain to a degree.

There is no absolute in the physical universe. It is all a relative thing. Once one comes to realize that all is uncertain to one degree or another, then the problem becomes how to make real time decisions. Otherwise, one is left with

taking more and more measurements, gathering more and more data, until the time to act passes, and one cannot affect anything. That is the only thing that becomes a certainty--uncertainty--and even that is relative!

So, Thomas was a sort of modern-day scientific atheist. He could project the future with some clarity. He knew that accompanying Jesus to Jerusalem would probably mean death for all of them. And without a doubt Thomas seemed a loyal follower of Jesus.

Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" tells about a conversation between Alice and the Cheshire cat. Alice says, "Tell me, please, Cheshire puss, which way I ought to go from here?" "Well," says the Cheshire cat, "that depends pretty much on where you want to go." "Well," said Alice, "I don't really care where I get to." "Then," said the Cheshire cat, "it doesn't really make much difference which way you go, does it?"

When we get to a point in our lives where we are relatively happy to remain, then we have no motivation to do anything differently, or change anything. What happens however is that we are never really able to keep things the way they are. We always face dynamic forces that twist something good into something bad, or may occasionally turn something bad good again. Our task is to keep afloat in this gigantic sea of constant change.

One of the facets of change is that each generation seems to have to absorb

more and more change. As a result the current 'younger generation,' sometimes referred to as Generation X, or "Gen Xers", are expected not only to change jobs multiple times, it is anticipated that they will have to change careers six times during their lifetimes. Can you imagine how different your life would be if you changed careers six times during your lifetime? As a result Gen Xers have a suspicion of anything that claims to be unchangeable, and religious ideas are just that in most of their minds.

New statistics project that the even newer generation, called the Millennials, will have a new job every two to three years, so work will always seem fragile, and their off from work time will always be vulnerable to the search for the next great job, or any job whatsoever.

There are still burial remains and churches named after St. Thomas and inscribed with his 52 AD landing and missionary work there before he was later martyred. The oldest of India's

churches ascribe their faith to the very missionary work of doubting Thomas.

<http://www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/predigt.php?id=163&kennung=20070415en>

http://day1.org/2924-when_christ_shows_up

The risen Lord gave his disciples, peace, power and purpose.

The Rev. William E. Flippin, Jr., is senior pastor of St. Matthew Evangelical

Lutheran Church in Columbus, GA. He writes:

‘This is our purpose. We are to be: a mouth to speak for Jesus; feet to run errands for Jesus, hands to do the work of Jesus, and a heart to love Jesus.’

What is more, he keeps showing up. As he came back a week later for Thomas, Jesus keeps coming back week after week among his gathered disciples - - in the word, the water, the bread, and the wine -- not wanting any to miss out

on the life and peace he gives. And he keeps sending us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a world that, like us, so desperately needs his gifts of life and peace.

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1991

Traditionally, he [Thomas] is said to have traveled outside the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel, traveling as far as India.[5][6]. According to tradition, the Apostle reached Muziris, India in 52 AD and baptized several people who are

today known as Saint Thomas Christians or Nasranis. After his death, the reputed relics of Saint Thomas the Apostle were enshrined as far as Mesopotamia in the 3rd century, and later moved to various places. In 1258, some of the relics were brought to Abruzzo in Ortona, Italy, where they have been held in the Church of Saint Thomas the Apostle.[7] He is often regarded as the Patron Saint of India, and the name Thomas remains quite popular among Saint Thomas Christians of India.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle

Besides the Acts of Thomas there was a widely circulated Infancy Gospel of Thomas probably written in the later 2nd century, and probably also in Syria, which relates the miraculous events and prodigies of Jesus' boyhood. This is the document which tells for the first time the familiar legend of the twelve sparrows which Jesus, at the age of five, fashioned from clay on the Sabbath day, which took wing and flew away. The earliest manuscript of this work is a 6th-

century one in Syriac. This gospel was first referred to by Irenaeus; Ron Cameron notes: "In his citation, Irenaeus first quotes a non-canonical story that circulated about the childhood of Jesus and then goes directly on to quote a passage from the infancy narrative of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:49). Since the Infancy Gospel of Thomas records both of these stories, in relatively close proximity to one another, it is possible that the apocryphal writing cited by Irenaeus is, in fact, what is now known as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

Because of the complexities of the manuscript tradition, however, there is no certainty as to when the stories of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas began to be written down."

The best known in modern times of these documents is the "sayings" document that is being called the Gospel of Thomas, a noncanonical work whose date is disputed. The opening line claims it is the work of "Didymos Judas Thomas" – whose identity is unknown. This work was discovered in a Coptic

translation in 1945 at the Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi, near the site of the monastery of Chenoboskion. Once the Coptic text was published, scholars recognized that an earlier Greek translation had been published from fragments of papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus in the 1890s.

◁▷ A number of early Christian writings written during centuries immediately following the first Ecumenical Council of 325 mention Thomas' mission.

The Acts of Thomas, sometimes called by its full name The Acts of Judas Thomas: 2nd/3rd century (c. 180–230)[34][35] Gist of the testimony: The Apostles cast lots as to where they should go, and to Thomas, twin brother of Jesus, fell India.

◁ Saint Thomas Cross[edit]

Mar Thoma Sliva.jpg

In the 16th-century work *Jornada*, Antonio Gouvea writes of ornate crosses known as Saint Thomas Crosses. It is also known as Nasrani Menorah[53] or

Mar Thoma Sliba.[54] These crosses date from the 6th century and are found in a number of churches in Kerala, Mylapore and Goa. Jornada is the oldest known written document to refer to this type of cross as a St. Thomas Cross. Gouvea also writes about the veneration of the Cross at Cranganore, referring to the cross as "Cross of Christians". It is widely perceived as the symbol of Saint Thomas Christians.

There are several interpretations of the Nasrani symbol. The interpretation

based on Christian Jewish tradition assumes that its design was based on Jewish menorah, an ancient symbol of the Hebrews, which consists of seven branched lamp stand (candelabra).[55]

The interpretation based on local culture states that the Cross without the figure of Jesus and with flowery arms symbolizing "joyfulness" points to the resurrection theology of St. Paul; the Holy Spirit on the top represents the role of Holy Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lotus symbolizing Buddhism and the Cross over it shows that Christianity was

established in the land of Buddha. The 3 steps indicate Calvary and the rivulets, channels of grace flowing from the Cross.[56]

<> Origen: 3rd century (185–254?), quoted in Eusebius; Church represented: Alexandrian/ Greek Biographical.

Christian Philosopher, b-Egypt, Origen taught with great acclaim in Alexandria and then in Caesarea.[42] He is the first known writer to record the casting of lots by the Apostles. Origen's original work has been lost, but his statement about Parthia falling to Thomas has been

preserved by Eusebius. “Origen, in the third chapter of his Commentary on Genesis, says that, according to tradition, Thomas’s allotted field of labour was Parthia”. [43]

Eusebius of Caesarea: 4th century (died 340); Church Represented:

Alexandrian/Greek Biographical [44]

Quoting Origen, Eusebius says: “When the holy Apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered over all the world, Thomas, so the tradition has it, obtained as his portion Parthia...” [45]

"Judas, who is also called Thomas" has a

role in the legend of king Abgar of Edessa (Urfa), for having sent Thaddaeus to preach in Edessa after the Ascension (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiae* 1.13; III.1; Ephrem the Syrian also recounts this legend.)

<> Death [of Thomas] [Wikipedia]

According to tradition,[26] St. Thomas was killed in 72 AD. Nasrani Churches from Kerala in South India state that St. Thomas died at Mylapore near Chennai in India and his body was interred there.

<> The Acts of Thomas identifies his second mission in India with a kingdom

ruled by King Mahadeva[citation needed], one of the rulers of a 1st-century dynasty in southern India. It is most significant that, aside from a small remnant of the Church of the East in Kurdistan, the only other church to maintain a distinctive identity is the Saint Thomas Christian congregations along the Malabar Coast (modern-day Kerala) in southwest India. According to the most ancient tradition of this church, Thomas evangelized this area and then crossed to the Coromandel Coast of

southeast India, where, after carrying out a second mission, he died near Madras.

<> According to Eusebius' record, Thomas and Bartholomew were assigned to Parthia and India.[24][25].

<> According to The Passing of Mary, a text attributed to Joseph of Arimathea, [18] Thomas was the only witness of the Assumption of Mary into heaven. The other apostles were miraculously transported to Jerusalem to witness her death. Thomas was left in India, but after her first burial, he was transported to her tomb, where he witnessed her bodily

assumption into heaven, from which she dropped her girdle. In an inversion of the story of Thomas' doubts, the other apostles are skeptical of Thomas' story until they see the empty tomb and the girdle. [19]

<> Few texts identify Thomas' twin. In the Book of Thomas the Contender, part of the Nag Hammadi, it is said to be Jesus himself: "Now, since it has been said that you are my twin and true companion, examine yourself...". [9]

<> The name Thomas is derived from the Aramaic or Classical Syriac: ܛܘܡܐ

Toma, meaning twin. The equivalent term for twin in Greek is Didymus.



Craig Barnes, pastor of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, quotes Garrison Keillor who narrates “A Prairie Home Companion” on Public Radio each week. Garrison Keillor said, “We always have a backstage view of ourselves. We let the audience see only

the neatly arranged stage. But behind the curtain all kinds of things are lying around: old failures, hurts, guilt and shame; we hear that we are living in a shameless society, and that people are no longer bothered by shame. I don't believe it. Shame plagues our souls. Psychologists tell us that shame sweeps over us when we overstep our abilities, or when our fantasy about who we would like to be encounters the backstage reality of who we really are.

“Nothing is more crippling to our souls than working at hiding shame. We

lock up more and more doors, sealing off more and more rooms of the heart to prevent our true selves from being discovered. We think we are keeping the world out, but in fact we are keeping ourselves locked in.”

Thomas was ashamed that he had followed a man who would be condemned and killed as a common criminal, between two criminals. And Thomas knew dead men do not walk, they do not rise from their graves. Yet, the Lord never berated Thomas for his questioning God’s power. Jesus never

belittled the frailty of Thomas' faith.

Jesus only came to Thomas and held out his nail scarred hands of love. That was all it took. The open embrace, the non-judgmental look, the consoling words, "Do not doubt but believe." And Thomas acclaimed Jesus Christ his Lord and his God.

Don't let guilt or shame or doubt or anything else come between you and your Lord. He is holding out his hands to you today. Come within his warm embrace. Let him minister to you in

your needs. Let him forgive you for anything. Let him love you eternally.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

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