

### “A Witness without Doubts”

I feel sorry for Thomas. Every year we hear the account in John’s Gospel about how he is absent from the Jesus’ first post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. When he hears the story from them he refuses to believe them unless he sees Jesus and touches his wounds.

Thomas could have been remembered for so many other aspects of his life. He could be remembered as the disciple who had a twin brother or sister. Indeed, the name Thomas is derived from the Hebrew word for twin.

Thomas could also be remembered for his loyalty to Jesus. In chapter 11 of John’s Gospel in the lead up to the raising of Lazarus Jesus decides to go to Bethany. The disciples are fearful of going there because it is only one mile from Jerusalem and the authorities are seeking to arrest and kill Jesus. Thomas is the lone voice of support for Jesus who says “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”<sup>1</sup>

We could also remember Thomas as a great evangelist. Legend tells us that he traveled to India proclaiming the Gospel. There he established seven churches and baptized a number of families. He was martyred on St. Thomas Mount. There is a basilica in the city of Chennai, Tamil Nadu that houses some of his relics.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these all these aspects of St. Thomas’ life it is his doubts about the resurrection appearance for which he is remembered as “Doubting Thomas,” which has become a synonym for a skeptic or non-believer.

While, I doubt anyone would want to be the archetype for doubt or skepticism, Thomas’ doubt has led to many gifts for Christians through the ages. First of all there is the blessing that Jesus gives those of us who did not see Jesus resurrected. Jesus says to Thomas after he professes his faith, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”<sup>3</sup> From that day forward those of us who have believed in the resurrection of Jesus receive this special blessing all because of Thomas’ doubt.

Another gift is the permission to have doubts. Thomas, one of the original disciples of Jesus, had doubts about the resurrection. His doubts give us permission to struggle with doubt. In fact, it is part of our Christian and specifically Anglican heritage to have doubts, to ask questions, to wonder and ponder about God. The “three-legged stool” of Anglicanism<sup>4</sup> enshrines scripture, tradition and reason as the authorities which guide us. Reason is the human faculty to think, doubt, and seek understanding through the God-given capacity of thought and judgment.

Thomas, for all of the shade that has been cast upon him over the centuries is, not unlike Peter, an example we can live with and up to. We can find hope in his humanity. We can be encouraged in his willingness to question. We can know that despite his doubts Jesus did not forsake him. We are strengthened knowing that Thomas went on to be a revered evangelist of Jesus to lands well beyond his home. He served Jesus Christ even unto his own death as a witness, to Jesus’ teaching, crucifixion and resurrection. That is the resurrection that, without a doubt, promises us life everlasting in God.

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<sup>1</sup> John 11:16 NRSV Thomas who as called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>2</sup> Read more about St. Thomas at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_the\\_Apostle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle)

<sup>3</sup> John 20:29 NRSV

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/authority-sources-anglicanism>