

FAITH IS THE EAR THAT HEARS THE WORD OF GOD, AND BY HIS SPIRIT WANTS TO HEAR MORE. AN EAR THAT DOESN'T HEAR PERFECTLY IS STILL AN EAR, MADE BY ITS CREATOR. FAITH IS THE EYE BY WHICH WE LOOK TO JESUS. A TEAR-FILLED EYE IS STILL AN EYE THAT OUR GOD CAN LIBERATE.

FAITH IS THE HAND WITH WHICH WE REACH OUT TO CHRIST'S OPEN ARMS. A TREMBLING HAND IS STILL A HAND. FAITH IS THE TONGUE BY WHICH WE TASTE HOW GOOD THE LORD IS. AN UNCLEAN TONGUE IS STILL A TONGUE WHICH CAN SPEAK GOD'S TRUTH, CALMING EMOTIONS AND GIVING EARS ANOTHER INVITATION.

FAITH IS THE FOOT WHICH WALKS WITH JESUS. A LAME FOOT IS STILL A FOOT. THE ONE WHO COMES SLOWLY NEVERTHELESS COMES. WE ARE CALLED, GATHERED, AND ENLIGHTENED BY THE CREATOR OF EYES, TONGUES AND HANDS.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN SHUT OUT BY DOUBT? THOMAS IS. THE DOORS WHERE JESUS MET THE DISCIPLES ARE LOCKED, AND THOMAS IS OUTSIDE. HIS DOUBTS KEPT HIM FROM SEEING THE RISEN CHRIST.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DOUBT? WHEN JESUS SEEMS A FAR AWAY DREAM AND THE WORLD SO CLOSE, HOW DO YOU HANDLE THAT? WHEN THE THRONE OF GOD SEEMS VACANT AND JUSTICE IS BURIED IN A TOMB – WHAT THEN?

THOMAS ALLOWS HIS DOUBTS TO LOCK HIM OUT THIS TIME. EARLIER, WHEN JESUS PROPOSED A DANGEROUS TRIP, THOMAS SAID: *LET US GO THAT WE MAY DIE WITH HIM.* HE'S THE GUY WHO SAID: *LORD, WE DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING; HOW CAN WE KNOW THE WAY?* THOMAS SIMPLY HAS A LITTLE EYORE IN HIM: *UNLESS I SEE THE NAILMARKS; I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S ALIVE.*

LIKE MANY OF US, HE WANTS FIRSTHAND EVIDENCE. THE LACK OF IT CAUSES HIS FEAR TO GROW. THE DOOR OF FEAR LOCKS HIM OUT EASTER EVENING. HE ISN'T A WIMP, BUT SEEING THE HATRED AND HOSTILITY HEAPED ON JESUS AT THE CRUCIFIXION MAY HAVE CRACKED HIS ARMOR. HE COULD BE NEXT.

THE FEAR OF DEATH AND PERSECUTION STILL KEEPS WOULD-BE DISCIPLES IN THE SHADOWS OF NEUTRALITY. CHRISTIANS ARE OFTEN AFRAID TO BE RIDICULED FOR THEIR FAITH, SO THEY HIDE BY SHUTTING UP OR FITTING IN.

I'M SURE YOU'VE FAILED JESUS AND THE TRUTH OF HIS BIBLE FOR FEAR OF THE COST – A FRIEND, A PROMOTION, MONEY, OR ALL THE COMPLICATIONS, TIME AND ENERGY INVOLVED WHEN YOU DO IT RIGHT. FEAR CAN LOCK OUT YOUR FAITH.

...LIKE THOMAS, I'M A PESSIMIST. I READY MYSELF FOR THE WORST, SO MY HOPES ARE NOT DASHED. THOMAS KNOWS JESUS IS DEAD; HE SAW THEM PIERCE HIS SIDE. THAT DEFEAT HAS LED TO DOUBT.

WHEN I FEEL DEFEATED, I GET SELF-SUFFICIENT AND CYNICAL. I DON'T THINK OF OTHERS; I SHUT PEOPLE OUT BY LIVING IN MY OWN LITTLE WORLD WHERE I'M SAFE. IF THAT HAPPENS TO YOU; I'VE GOT A GREAT BOOK FOR YOU TO READ.

2 THE BIBLE IS FULL OF PESSIMISTS. GOD HAMMERS OUT THEIR FAITH ON THE ANVIL OF DOUBT. FAITH WON'T LET PESSIMISM LOCK YOU OUT. YOU MIGHT GIVE UP ON YOUR MYSTERIOUS GOD; HE NEVER GIVES UP ON YOU. AND, YOU KNOW IT!

...GRIEF IS ANOTHER DOOR THAT SHUTS THOMAS OUT. HE LOVED JESUS; HE GAVE UP HIS LIFE TO FOLLOW HIM. NOW, HE'S DEAD – KILLED! HE WANTS TO BE ALONE; SORROW OFTEN COVETS SILENCE AND SOLITUDE. BUT, GRIEF, NOT SHARED, LEADS TO LONELINESS AND DEPRESSION. THOMAS MISSES OUT ON BROTHERLY CONSOLATION, AND SEEING JESUS ALIVE AS HE STEWS IN HIS GRIEF.

A PASTOR LOST HIS WIFE AND CHILD IN A SENSELESS ACT OF VIOLENCE. AFTER A WEEK OF GRIEVING, HE STEPPED INTO THE PULPIT AND TOLD HIS CONGREGATION: *I HAVE BEEN TO THE BOTTOM. AND, IT IS SOLID!* FAITH IS STRENGTHENED WHEN WE SUFFER WITH JESUS – THE ROCK ON WHICH WE STAND!

WE KNOW TOO WELL THE DOORS OF GRIEF, PESSIMISM AND FEAR THAT SHUT THOMAS OUT ON EASTER. BUT WE FIND OURSELVES LOCKED INSIDE THE DOORS, AS THOMAS DOES, THIS FOLLOWING SUNDAY.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE TO BE LOCKED IN RATHER THAN OUT. LIKE AN ICEBERG MELTING IN THE GULF STREAM, TOMMY'S FAITH IS SHRINKING. WE MISS A GREAT DEAL WHEN WE SEPARATE OURSELVES FROM EACH OTHER AND GO IT ALONE.

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT GOD WANTED THIS VIRUS TO KEEP US LOCKED OUT. WE KNOW IT'S TOO EASY TO SAY EVERYONE SHOULD BE HERE DYING FOR THE FAITH. YET, GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO US HERE THAT CAN'T WHEN WE'RE ALONE.

CHRIST BUILT HIS CHURCH TO ESTABLISH A GROUP OF LOVING MEMBERS UNITED AS HIS BODY; READY AND WILLING TO HELP THE HELPLESS AND GIVE HOPE TO THE HOPELESS. TOGETHER, AS DOUBTERS, OUR FAITH IS STRENGTHENED BECAUSE WE MEET WITH JESUS AND HEAR HIS WORD OF TRUTH AND GRACE THAT TRULY IMPACTS OUR EVERYDAY LIFE OUTSIDE THESE DOORS.

GRACE AND TRUTH ARE WAY BETTER FROM INSIDE. THOMAS IS UNCOMPROMISINGLY HONEST. HE REFUSES TO SAY HE UNDERSTANDS IF HE DOESN'T OR THAT HE BELIEVES WHAT HE CANNOT. HE WILL NOT QUIET HIS FEARS BY PRETENDING... *UNLESS I PUT MY FINGER AND THRUST MY HAND!*

YOUR STRUGGLES CAN LEAD TO A STRONGER FAITH – BUT, IT HAPPENS ON THIS SIDE OF THE DOOR. FROM THE INSIDE YOU CAN DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS AND YOU CAN SEE GOD'S TRUTH FULL OF MIRACULOUS GRACE. THOMAS DOES! JESUS IS WAITING FOR HIM TO COME TO CHURCH. THE SPIRIT IS LEADING HIM THERE!

JESUS SAID: *I AM THE DOOR!* THROUGH A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH OUR CRUCIFIED LORD, GOD HAMMERS OUT THE DOUBT AND WE LIVE INSIDE FAITH – WE LIVE IN CHRIST! IT COMES LIKE A TIDAL WAVE FOR THOMAS. FOR MANY OF US IT'S MORE LIKE THE TIDE AS HE DAILY REPLACES OUR DOUBTS WITH HIS PRESENCE.

PUT YOUR FINGER HERE, BEHOLD MY HANDS; PLACE YOUR HAND IN MY SIDE. DO NOT BE DISBELIEVING, BUT BELIEVING. THOMAS ISN'T SURPRISED; HE IS TOTALLY EMBRACED BY THE TRUTH OF JESUS CHRIST! *MY LORD AND MY GOD!*

3 GRIEF, FEAR AND PESSIMISM HAVE TO BE LIVED THROUGH. IT'S LIKE WALKING THROUGH WATER; SOMETIMES THERE ARE LITTLE WAVES LAPPING AT YOUR FEET; SOMETIMES AN ENORMOUS BREAKER KNOCKS YOU OVER.

NONE OF IT DROWNS YOUR SOUL BECAUSE YOU ARE DROWNED ALREADY IN BAPTISM. YOU ARE PLACED ON THE CROSS TO DIE WITH CHRIST AND YOU ARE RAISED FROM THE TOMB WITH JESUS TO LIVE EVERY DAY TOWARD HEAVEN.

LIFE HERE ON EARTH CAN BE DISTURBING. LIFE IN CHRIST SEES LIGHT SHINING OUT OF THE TOMB AND REJOICES IN GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE. HE'S HERE SO YOU HAVE YOUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTER. YOU HAVE EASTER IN THIS PLACE!

BRING YOUR HONEST DOUBTS TO HIS TABLE; HE IS YOUR LORD AND YOUR GOD. COME WITH YOUR EARS FULL OF HIS WORDS, YOUR EYES SEEING HIS MERCY, YOUR HANDS REACHING FOR HIS SALVATION, YOUR TONGUE READY TO TASTE HIS GOODNESS, AND YOUR FEET CERTAIN OF BOTH COMING TO RECEIVE EVERLASTING LOVE AND TAKING THAT LOVE TO OTHERS.

JESUS, BY HIS CRUCIFIED AND RISEN BODY, TRANSFORMS OUR DOUBT INTO BELIEF. WE ARE BLESSED! JESUS HAS CALLED US INTO HIS ROOM OF GRACE. HIS SPIRIT HAS GATHERED US TOGETHER SO WE'RE NOT ALONE. OUR HEAVENLY FATHER DECLARES US FORGIVEN AND PARTAKERS OF HIS MYSTERIOUS AND RESURRECTING TRUTH. WE ARE LOCKED IN!

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!



About the Cover

Though Thomas believed upon the sight of the risen Christ, Jesus says that those who have not seen and yet believe are blessed. Just as John's Gospel account tells us, these events were recorded, written, preserved, and shared so that we might have faith and believe that Jesus is not only the Christ but also our Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the Word, the very faith of which Jesus speaks is happening today in us!

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

First Reading: Acts 4:32-35

³²The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Epistle: 1 John 1:1-2:2

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

^{2:1}My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But

if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Holy Gospel: John 20:19-31

¹⁹On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."

²⁴Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.