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## *Team Thomas: It's Okay to Look for Proof*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr  
The Second Sunday of Easter – Year C**

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Sure, the pews have thinned out a bit, and the timpani have gone home, but it is still Easter. We still bask in the signs and stories of the resurrection even after the big day has passed, for 50 whole days there is still so much more to the story. It is a long-standing tradition that on this Sunday, we hear the story of the resurrected Jesus appearing before his friends, first to the group without Thomas, and then again with Thomas. You know Thomas. People, maybe even some of us, call him Doubting Thomas with a tinge of judgement. But we're Episcopalians, right? Aren't we the intellectual denomination, don't we celebrate unique and thoughtful faith journeys, aren't we open to folks who want to pry a bit into scripture? We judge this man, but isn't he just like us? Awe struck by this impossible wonder, but still with a few questions.

I have a scar on my left middle finger. When I was a kid, one day left alone in the kitchen, I tried to open a Capri Sun, one of those juices that comes in the little silver pouch, you know? Back in my day they hadn't discovered the easy open technology that these privileged children of today enjoy. So, I was struggling. Well, in my young brain, it seemed wise to use the sharp tip of a steak knife to get into the little straw hole. You can imagine what happened next, I stuck that knife into the Capri Sun, and it went straight through to my little middle finger. It wasn't much of a thing, it bled, I got a band aid, no stitches or anything like that. And yet, all these years later, I have a clear scar right here on my middle finger. If I was telling you this story over lunch or in the Court of Gratitude, some of you would just nod politely thinking me a young doofus, but I'd venture to say that most of you would probably want to see the little scar on my middle finger. You might even say, "prove it." To which I would say (pretend to show middle finger, but don't really do it!). You'd want to see the scar! It's a story that comes with evidence to prove the facts, no one would begrudge your wanting to get a look at my middle finger.

We like proof.

We like when someone can back up a story with evidence.

If you want to set a Guinness World Record, you will first need to go to their website to download a 30-page document that tells you exactly how to collect evidence including approved witnesses, timekeepers, stewards, and logbooks. No one's gonna take your word for it!

We are an evidence-based people, and Thomas and his buddies were no different. But Jesus in his resurrected wisdom knew that. That's why he went to his friends right away to show them what had happened. Hey guys, look, smell my breath, it's me, it worked! The disciples got proof, Jesus knew they needed it. So, he went to them. He went and with his own breath, gave them a new sign of his presence, his peace which passes all understanding.

Can't you imagine after that first appearance how everyone was buzzing about this new and amazing thing that God had done? Hopeful believers, skeptics, late to the party converts everyone was talking about it. I can picture the fact checkers going around to the disciples collecting evidence to prove that this was real and they go to Thomas who should have been there.

The examination goes like this:

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

"Yes"

"Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Pierced him in the side?"

"Yes, yes"

"Laid him in the tomb?"

"Yes"

"And were you there when he came through the locked door of the house where the disciples had met and breathed the Holy Spirit onto them?"

"No..." Thomas says.

Poor Thomas wasn't in the room. He couldn't prove it. He didn't see the sign that Jesus really had come back from the dead. He missed the big day. Maybe there would be more signs, but who knew?

Now, we have to acknowledge that the whole reason that anyone believed in Jesus as something different, something special, the Messiah even, the whole reason anyone bought into this stuff in the first place is because they saw him performing signs, they saw evidence. Or if they didn't see it with their own eyes, at least they heard from their trusted cousin's best friend's neighbor that some guy in sandals named Jesus healed the grandmother down the road. The reason Jesus had a following was because he was out there doing the work of showing people what he could do. The gospels, all four of them, tell us those stories over and over again of Jesus doing this God work and the ways people responded to it, the ways people believed in what they saw.

Thomas had seen, firsthand, some remarkable signs from Jesus. So, it's no wonder he wanted to see proof of his friend somehow now alive after he watched him die in agony on the cross. Sure, maybe Thomas threw a little fit because he missed out, no one likes to be left out of the big moment. But just like you and me, he wanted to see some evidence. He wanted a sign like he'd gotten before that Jesus was the real deal.

Well, a week later, Jesus came back. No, it wasn't the first appearance, but to borrow from Dean Candler's sermon last week, so what? It was a sign. A chance for Thomas to see for himself. And Jesus wasn't mad, he was like come on, touch me, come here, Thomas, it's me. Jesus wanted to give Thomas the proof he was looking for. There again, evidence-based Thomas found himself reassured by Jesus and proclaiming, "My Lord and my God." Faith restored, or strengthened, we don't know that his faith had really gone away. There an impossible resurrected Jesus stood right in front of his friend. And all Thomas could do was boldly proclaim that which he knew to be true, that it was his Lord, his God.

Sometimes we criticize Thomas for having those doubts, those questions, for thinking about what had happened rather than just blindly trusting or having faith without proof, but that's not it at all. Remember that it was Kierkegaard who said that "faith begins precisely where thinkings leaves off." There was no reasoning that a man came back from the dead. It was beyond logical thinking that a guy Thomas saw hanging dead on the cross was back with scars and the hair and the breath. It didn't make sense, but Thomas wasn't trying to make sense of it. Making sense wasn't the point. We don't follow Jesus because it makes sense. We follow Jesus because it doesn't make sense. We follow Jesus because we have seen some proof and we've heard some stories and they don't make any sense, but they resonate deep within us. We have seen signs that assure our hearts that there is something bigger at work than our menial reasonable lives. Thomas didn't want to understand the mechanics of the resurrection, he just wanted a sign like the signs he'd seen before that helped establish his illogical faith in the first place.

You and I were not in that locked room with the disciples. Just like Thomas, we missed the meeting. But haven't you looked and seen signs of Jesus working in this world? Haven't you seen stuff that defies logic and reason that you can only explain as God's handiwork? Haven't you been moved to depths of your being by something so utterly mind blowing that your faith assures you it must be God? I wouldn't be standing here today if I hadn't.

Thomas knew this didn't make sense. He knew it seemed impossible. He worried he wouldn't get a sign. But we cannot tell the whole story of Thomas without the part where Jesus showed up for him.

Jesus shows up.

For Thomas, for us, for anyone, for everyone.

Jesus shows up.

Some of you have told me these stories. In the last week you have told me these stories. You've said, "Oh it was a total God moment!" or "Suddenly I felt peace I hadn't felt in months, and I knew God was with me." You say this stuff and you know that it's a sign, some sort of proof that God is saying, "here I am with you. Look, touch, see me." There's nothing wrong with looking for these signs. We're not entitled to it, God doesn't owe us these signs, but still, we get them. Big and little, extraordinary and ordinary, in our bodies, in creation, in stories, in relationships, the Body of Christ reveals itself all around us. It's our job when we see it to stop and say, "My Lord and my God." Proclaiming boldly what our faith tells us is true. That God is here. That the impossible becomes possible through God. Even something as wild as resurrection can happen with.

Our doubt, our questions, our thinking, our hope, our faith can dwell in the certainty that God is among us. We can take God's word for it, but we'll also see proof, evidence abounds all around us. Our Lord, our God is right here.