

Faithful Thomas
John 20:24-31
April 24, 2022
First Presbyterian, Luling

I was good friends in college with a girl named Molly. Molly was six feet tall, lean and lanky. Everyone, and I mean everyone, assumed that Molly not only played basketball, but that she loved it, and was good at it. Just because she was tall. The truth, which Molly was happy to share, though tired of sharing, was that she hated playing basketball. She wasn't good at it, she didn't like it, and she didn't appreciate people making assumptions about what she liked, based on what she looked like. All they had to do was ask her, rather than assume. A "Do you like sports?" question was a way nicer way to get that information than, "Wow, you must be great at basketball." You see the difference, yes?

We all make assumptions and draw incorrect conclusions about other people, based on all kinds of things. Outward appearance, our own past experiences and acquaintances, statistics, all kinds of things. Here's a mistake I've made and try not to make any more: just because a person has a Spanish last name does not mean that person speaks Spanish. And vice versa. We've likely had people make ignorant assumptions and draw incorrect conclusions about us, based on incomplete information and stereotypes.

Poor Thomas, though. The assumptions people have made about him really take the cake. He's been tagged with the nickname "Doubting Thomas" for centuries, and it's completely unfair. Thomas may have doubts, but if we're honest, so do the rest of us, and Thomas is way more than his doubts, as are the rest of us. And Thomas is a disciple who wants to follow Jesus in the most faithful way he can.

Earlier on in the Gospel of John, it's Thomas who sets up Jesus's "I am the way, the truth, and the life" comment. Jesus has told them about where he is going, that he is going to prepare a place for them, and that they know the way to where he is going. Thomas speaks out for all of them, when he admits, "Actually, Jesus, we don't know at all where you're going, so how can we know the way?" And Jesus assures him, and the other disciples, and all of us: "I am the way."

In today's passage, Thomas has been left out, and all he is asking for is the same opportunities and experiences that the other disciples have already have. First it was Mary Magdalene, encountering the risen Jesus in the garden. She comes back and tells them all, "I have seen the Lord." Then everyone but Thomas

is in the room, scared, locked in. Who knows where Thomas is—maybe he isn't held captive by the same fear, or maybe he's just gone out to find some groceries. There's no way to know.

Everyone else, though, sees the risen Jesus appear right there with them. They see his body, they see his wounds, they hear him speak these words to their hearts: "Peace, be with you." So then they tell Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" Just like Mary Magdalene had said "I have seen the Lord." Thomas is really and truly the odd man out, now. He wants to see the Lord, too. All he's asking for is what all his fellow disciples have already received.

He needs an affirmation, that he is still included in the relationship with Jesus. He needs confirmation that his trust has not been misplaced. If there is a place where Jesus is going to show up, Thomas wants—longs, yearns—to be present, so he can see for himself. If there's a place where Jesus is going to show up, I definitely want to be there, too.

A week later, Thomas is with the disciples in the same place. They haven't excluded him because of his demands. He hasn't decided to exclude himself because he missed out. They're still together, which seems significant. That must have been a long week. Again Jesus appears. Again Jesus says "Peace be with you." And he offers the same opportunity to Thomas that the other disciples had had. "Here's my body. Touch if you need to." Maybe Thomas did touch Jesus's wounds, maybe not. John doesn't say. But Jesus was willing to give him what he needed, in order to keep his trust. Jesus says "Do not doubt but believe." Those words could just as accurately be translated "Don't be untrusting, but trusting." I don't read that as a condemnation of any kind, but as an invitation. Jesus is inviting Thomas to maintain his trust and faith, to maintain his relationship as a disciple.

And Thomas replies with these words of faith: "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas, the one who stuck around and kept trusting, Thomas the one who asked for what he needed, Thomas the one who is willing to say what everyone else was thinking, Thomas the one who offers the fullest proclamation of who Jesus is. Doubting Thomas? Not hardly. This is faithful Thomas, and he shows us what faithful discipleship looks like.

He isn't scared. The rest of the disciples are scared, locked in the room, for at least a week. But not Thomas. More than that, though, he's not scared to ask Jesus for what he needs. He asked for the way to where Jesus is going, because he needed to know. And now he asks to see and touch Jesus, because he needs that reassurance. He isn't afraid that he will be judged as lacking in faith, or being

weak, or not quick with his thoughts. He isn't afraid, because it's Jesus that he's asking, and he already knows and trusts Jesus, and Jesus already knows him.

He trusts Jesus. He trusts that Jesus will meet him where he is, in his feelings of being left out and missing out. He trusts that Jesus will provide what he needs, even if it ends up being hard or confusing. He trusts that Jesus isn't going to abandon him.

He sticks with the rest of the disciples, and they stick with him. There could have been a clear divide between those who have seen the Lord, and Thomas, who has not. Thomas is having a hard time, but the rest of the disciples let him be himself, without pretending things are ok when they aren't. And Thomas seems to let the rest of the disciples be scared and lock themselves in, without needing them to pretend they aren't scared. This is a community that Jesus has built, a community of trust.

Thomas is a faithful disciple. Not scared. Trusting. Honest. Works to live in relationship with Jesus and in relationship with those who are disciples alongside him. Doubting Thomas doesn't begin to capture who he really is, and we can learn a lot from walking in Thomas's way, which is the way, the truth, and the life, the way that Jesus brings.