



CHURCH of  
the SAVIOUR

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## “Redeeming Doubt: John”

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John 20:19-29

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<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” <sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>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.” <sup>26</sup>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.” <sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>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.”

*This sermon is part of a three-part series on the story of the post-resurrection appearances to the disciples. The three sermons are designed to be monologues told from the perspectives of John, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas. As such, this manuscript is only a guide – what is shared in worship will be more free-flowing and improvisational.*

It’s hard to find words to describe the extremes of emotions I felt that week. Even to borrow one of your metaphors – a roller coaster – doesn’t do it justice. When we entered Jerusalem with Jesus, it felt like anything was possible. It seemed like our feet didn’t even touch the ground or the cloaks and branches spread out along the road. People cheered Jesus like he was the king riding into the city after winning a great battle, and we were his royal courtiers. I thought this was a sign of how the rest of our time in Jerusalem was going to play out. I couldn’t have been more wrong.

Things took a bad turn quickly. The very next day, when we entered the temple, Jesus lost it. I’d never seen him angry before, especially like that. It was the money changers that set him off. Everyone seemed to be trying to cash in on the Passover festival. The outer court felt more like a marketplace than an entrance to God’s house. And Jesus wasn’t having it. He started shouting, kicked over tables full of coins, grabbed a piece of rope and used it to scatter animals and people. I’m surprised we weren’t all arrested on the spot.

But we weren’t. Jesus led us right into the temple like nothing had happened. For the next few days, he taught and healed anyone who came to him. Everyone was so happy. Jesus was happy, too. Children paraded around with palm branches, reenacting his entry into Jerusalem. But all that commotion is what got the temple leaders’ attention...and their fury.

And were they ever angry! They demanded to know who he thought he was. Someone told Jesus to scold the children. He ignored them. Then they started asking him questions about why he was teaching there and by what authority. They tried asking him questions about God, too, but his answers were better than they expected. And his questions were better than their questions. Pretty soon they quit asking and just left him alone...or so we thought.

When we gathered to celebrate the Passover, Jesus was different. He started off washing our feet, like a servant. When he spoke, he had a sense of urgency, like every word mattered. During dinner, he was quiet, deep in thought, troubled. He told us one of us would betray him. When he broke the *matzot*, he told us it was his body. When he raised the cup of blessing, he told us it was his blood. We could sense his pain, and we felt it, too.

The rest is too painful to recount in detail. His arrest, his trial, the way they treated him. I couldn't stand to watch, but I couldn't leave him. And then, it was over. He was gone.

That Sunday morning, when Mary Magdalene came and found Peter and me, I was terrified. It was very early – the sun was just visible on the horizon. Not that I was asleep – I hadn't really slept since that night in the garden. But I was hardly expecting a visitor at that hour. I was afraid she was there to warn us that the temple guards were rounding up Jesus's followers to finish the job. At first, I couldn't understand what she was saying. She was almost hysterical, whispering excitedly, the words all tumbling over one another. It didn't help that she was out of breath from running all the way from the tomb to find us. Even what I did understand didn't make sense at first. "The tomb...the stone. No guards. Empty."

Peter was first out the door, but I was the faster runner. Even after strapping on my sandals, I soon overtook him and outran him to the tomb. Sure enough, just like Mary had said, the stone was pushed aside. I bent down to look in, not daring to enter. But by then, Peter had caught up and just rushed headlong right inside. "John, come and see." There was the place they'd laid him. I know, because I was there. But where Jesus's body should have been, there was just a pile of linen wrappings, and next to it the cloth that had been around his head, rolled up and sitting by itself. *What could it mean? Had someone stolen the body? But why would they leave the wrappings behind? Was it a trap – someone trying to lure us in so they could arrest us? Or, could it be...*

Something was different in the air. It made my skin tingle. Or maybe it was something different in me. But somehow, I knew. I didn't know how, but I knew he was alive.

Not knowing who else might be around or if there was a patrol nearby, we decided it wasn't a good idea to wait around. We started back toward town and told Mary she should leave, too, but she was determined to stay and find answers. I don't really remember walking back. I was in a fog. For the first few minutes, neither Peter nor I said a word. Then finally, I began, "Peter, remember when the Lord said..."

"I remember," he cut me off. "How could I not? It didn't make sense then. I'm not sure it does now."

"What if," I started, but then stopped myself. My head was spinning. I needed to think. I waited for Peter to say what he was thinking, but he never did. We just went back to the house. I lay on my cot for a bit, but there was no way I could fall asleep. I tried to recall exactly the way Jesus had said it. "On the third day he will be raised." He'd been talking about the Son of Man, quoting Daniel...or was he? Was that just prophecy, or was it something else? Oh, I wished I'd asked him to explain it, but I was embarrassed to admit I didn't understand. And I was ashamed, because my brother and I had just asked for places of honor in the coming

kingdom and got a scolding in return. He said to be the greatest we had to be the least of all, like a servant. I was still playing that moment over in my head when Mary came back.

This time she wasn't quiet about it. Nothing could conceal her joy or quiet her voice. "I saw him! Peter, John, I saw him! He's alive! Jesus is risen!" I tried to calm her as best I could – it wasn't safe to draw attention to ourselves right now. But my heart was pounding, caught up in her excitement. "John, we have to find the others. He told me to tell you all."

It took a little while to get to everyone. We knew where some of them were staying, but others we had to guess. Jerusalem wasn't our town. And some of the guys didn't exactly *want* to be found – by us or anyone else. By late that afternoon, we'd tracked down everyone but Thomas – no luck finding him. And Judas, whatever happened to him. When we got together, we kept the door locked; like I said, it wasn't safe. Everyone was buzzing, questioning each other about what we'd heard and from whom, what was happening now, what might happen next. They asked Mary to tell it again and again – every detail. I think we were all in different places – some eager to spread the news, others afraid that Rome would use this as a pretext to crack down on his followers. And some of us – like me – just weren't sure what to think.

And then he appeared. I didn't see where he came from. Nobody did. It was like he'd been there all along. And for a moment, it felt like nothing had changed. But *everything* had changed. He spoke to us, as always knowing just what we needed to hear. "Peace, friends." There he was – just as I'd hoped and prayed he would be. I couldn't believe my eyes. Apparently, others couldn't, either, because they reached for him, gaping, full of questions. *Is it really you? But we saw you...die.*

He opened his palms to us. We could still see the marks of the nails. In his feet, too. He pulled back his robe so we could see the place in his side where the soldier had thrust the spear. I had a flashback to that moment, and thought I was going to pass out. He must have sensed it, because he reached out his hand to me and offered an encouraging smile. When I looked in his eyes, I knew everything was going to be okay. Better than okay. It was really him. Jesus was alive! He said he was sending us to continue his work. Then he breathed on us, and it was like whatever had brought him back to life brought us to life, too.

And just like that, he was gone. Our amazement turned to laughter and tears and hugs. Whatever we had dared to hope or believe before, now we had confirmation. Jesus was alive! We'd seen him ourselves!

A few minutes later, Thomas arrived. He'd heard we were looking for him and came as quickly as he could. We told him everything that had happened, from Mary's first visit to the tomb to Jesus's sudden appearance among us that evening. He struggled to follow all our excited words, looking from one face to the next, a mixture of hope and fear and...something else. Uncertainty? Mary told him how she didn't recognize Jesus until he spoke to her, how he had to ascend before she could take hold of him, but that he had been right here among us. Andrew told him how the wounds of the crucifixion were still visible, but not bleeding or painful. Philip talked about how it felt when Jesus breathed on him. I said, "Brother, I wish you could have been here."

Thomas just looked at all of us for a while, then shook his head. "I...I can't believe it. Jesus, alive? It's too much." He paced around the room for a minute, then abruptly sat down on a cushion. "Mary, you said you thought he was the gardener. What did he look like? The light was dark – are you sure you saw what you saw? It just doesn't add up."

"But Thomas, he told us..."

“He said a lot of things. He also told us that we knew where he was going. Well, I didn’t. And none of you did, either. Look, I haven’t slept in days. Any of you? Maybe you’re delusional. Maybe you only saw what you want to see.”

“Thomas, we *all* saw him. All of us. Together. We couldn’t have all imagined the same thing at the same time. We saw his wounds. We heard his voice. It was *him*.”

“Look, I trust you guys. We’ve been through a lot together. And I want to believe – I really do. My heart is there. But my head? I just can’t go through the pain of losing him again. Unless I see him for myself – touch his wounds and look him in the eye – I won’t believe it. I can’t.”

Then he just got up and left.

Our hearts were broken, but could we blame him? How many of us had believed Mary’s story – really *believed* it – when she told us? It wasn’t until Jesus was right there in front of us that our doubts disappeared. Thomas didn’t get to see him. He was the only one of us who missed out. Would any of us have acted differently in his shoes? Would I?