



The Church  
of the  
Good Shepherd

# Sermon

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**TITLE: “Grace for the  
Doubting Thomases”**

**04.08.18**



## Scripture 04.08.18

### John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

**19** When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

**20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

**21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

**22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

**23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

#### Jesus and Thomas

**24** But Thomas (who was called the Twin[a]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

**25** 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.”

**26** 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.”

**27** 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.”

**28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

**29** 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.”

## **The Purpose of This Book**

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

**31** But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[c]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

# “Grace for the Doubting Thomases”

**John 20:19-31**

## Introduction

Spiritual blindness is an adverse condition which manifests itself when someone is either unable or unwilling to acknowledge God’s grace, favor, and wisdom. But it’s deeper than that. **If someone is spiritually blind**, that person also spiritually deaf in the sense he or she might be unable to even hear testimonies of the Lord’s greatness. **If someone is spiritually deaf**, that person also spiritually mute in the sense that he or she may see evil happening right in his or her presence – and yet be unwilling to say anything against it. **If someone is spiritually mute**, that person has no sense of touch spiritually because his or her refusal to acknowledge God means separation from him and his divine protection. Finally, if someone lacks a spiritual sense of touch, then that person probably lacks a spiritual sense of taste.

Spiritual blindness is like a virus. It can easily spread doubt from one person to another; and from one group to another. The only cure for spiritual blindness is *grace*.

Jesus is the light of the world. We who believe in him – and rely on him – are supposed to live our Christian lives in such a manner that those who are lost out in the world might be inspired enough to seek out God for themselves. We are blessed with a vision beyond just our eyes. Christians also see with our hearts, our minds, our spirits, and our souls. When we encounter righteousness, we not only **see it** – we also **feel it**.

We've all heard the phrase "Seeing is believing", right? Well, this passage from the Gospel of John would challenge that phrase. In today's episode, Jesus' disciples are hunkered down – hiding out from the Roman authorities in hopes of avoiding crucifixion upon a cross as their leader, Jesus, had just suffered. Suddenly, at the depth of the disciples' fear and doubt and despair, Christ Jesus appeared in their midst. What happened next serves as a profound teachable moment; not only for those disciples who were present in that room – but also for anyone who aspires to be Christ-like.

I'd like to raise three points about the importance of extending grace for Thomas **then** – and towards everyone everywhere **now** who has ever doubted God; if even for a moment.

### **Move 1: First, we should all extend grace to Jesus' disciples – because every one of them was a Doubting Thomas.**

One of the reasons I love the disciples is their consistent humanity. Peter, James, John, Thomas, and the others traveled with Jesus. They ate with him. They prayed with him. And most notably, they had front row seats while Jesus healed the sick, fed the multitude, clothed the naked, taught at the synagogues, preached to the masses, cast out demons, and resurrected the dead. But in spite of all the miracles and signs and wonders Jesus performed in their presence – every single one of the disciples was a Doubting Thomas at some point during Jesus' ministry on earth.

Why did Judas betray Jesus with a kiss? *He doubted.* Why did Peter deny knowing Jesus three times as the cock crowed? *He doubted.* Why did James and John ask Jesus to assign one at his right hand and the other at his left in his glory? *They doubted.* Thomas is the disciple in today's Gospel reading held up for scorn for wanting to see proof that Jesus' return was real. His request even earned him the nickname "Doubting Thomas." But if we had been in Thomas' place, who amongst us wouldn't have said – or thought – something similar?

We should all extend grace to the disciples because of the unique position they were in. Imagine what it must have been like for human beings – imperfect by nature – being in the company of the only perfect person who will ever set foot on this planet. Imagine seeing one of your co-workers dispersing a raging storm by saying “*peace, be still*”; or witnessing a friend feed 5,000 hungry people with a fish combo from Long John Silver’s; or watching someone you regularly hung out with walking on the surface of the Tennessee River. *Yeah...* you would freak out, too. Just as they did.

**As Christians, we should give grace to the disciples because we are the disciples. They are us.**

**Move 2: Next, I pray you’ll extend grace to me – because I freely admit to being a Doubting Thomas myself.**

Much like Thomas the apostle, I love God. I love God’s people. I love the Church. Like Thomas, I have seen countless examples of God’s infinite grace and mercy and kindness and favor. I was even born and raised in **Thomas-ville**. But honesty compels me to share with you, Good Shepherd, that from time to time – even now – I struggle with doubt about my role in as a future leader in this Church. **How will I be seen? Will I be seen at all?**

All of you know that I’m from the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia. You know that I’m three weeks away from completing my M. Div program at the Sewanee School of Theology. Robert, Mac, Janice, and a few others here know that I’ve been interviewing for clergy positions over the last several weeks. A month ago, I interviewed at a large, wealthy, well-established parish in another state. The beauty of its buildings and warmth of its congregants reminded me very much of this **wonderful** place. A few days after my return to Sewanee, I received a phone call from the Rector of that parish. He told with regret that it was the unanimous opinion of the Vestry and the Search Committee members that I was not a good fit there. The Rector

told me that the possibility of my being the only congregant of color among its hundreds of members was not something the parish was ready to undertake at this time. The Vestry told the Rector to tell me that they rejected my call because they didn't want me to feel lonely in their parish. That was hard to accept from the Episcopal Church. It really hurt.

This past Wednesday was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. The racism he valiantly fought against is still very much alive. It's something I see every day – either covertly or overtly. Racism could end today – before the sun went down – if everyone touched and agreed to do so. But for whatever reason, we won't do that. I know that racism will end somehow, someday. After all, everything that has a beginning has an end. But discrimination won't end in my lifetime; or in my unborn grandchildren's lifetimes. As long as I live, some people will see me *as other, as less than, as not good enough*. That makes me sad. It makes me doubt our Church's commitment to truly fulfilling the Baptismal Covenant's call to strive for justice and respect the dignity of all persons.

**So I ask for your prayers, your well wishes, and your grace because I, too, am a doubting Thomas.**

**Move 3: Finally, I joyfully extend grace to you – because you too are a Doubting Thomas.**

Have you ever been hurt? Mistreated? Heartbroken? Lied to? Lied on? I suspect that you have – in your home or workplace or school; perhaps even in a house of worship. Your time of trial – whenever it was – may have caused you to doubt.

You didn't doubt because you wanted to. You didn't doubt because you don't love God or God's people. You doubted because you're human. You doubted because change can be scary. Possibly, you doubted because you felt unworthy of the joy, peace, and love the Lord intended for you to bask in all along. **For all those reasons, I joyfully extend grace to you because I love you, I share in your struggle, and I acknowledge you as God's beloved child.**

## Conclusion

As Christians, we should extend grace to all Doubting Thomases: past, present, and future. That includes the disciples, me, you, and everyone else.

I'm here to tell you with certainty today that in spite of your imperfections, **you are good enough. You are beautiful. You are powerful. You are a gift from God... for the people of God.** But in order to see it, in order to feel it, *you* have to know that for yourself. *You* have to claim that.

So open your eyes. Open your heart, your mind, your spirit, and your soul. Feel the Holy Spirit that dwells deep within you. *I see it. I see the Holy Spirit in every single one of you. Without a doubt.*