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Thomas the believer: John 20  
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The Western church has labeled the Apostle Thomas as doubting Thomas. This title carries a negative connotation. The Western church does not do justice to the Apostle Thomas who traveled to India to spread the good news and to create faithful communities who trusted and believed his testimony that Christ has risen from the dead.

The Apostle Thomas was a skeptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience. He thought that the diluted grieved disciples were imagining. He also assumed that the disciples saw a spirit. Encountering a spirit or a ghost of a deceased person is still a common belief in different communities around the world. He wanted to touch Jesus to believe that Jesus is real and not a spirit because you cannot touch a spirit. Thomas questioned his faith and the faith of his companions. Jesus confronts Thomas “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Jesus confronts Thomas with the reality that he was not among the dead anymore.

I do not discredit Thomas, and I do not think that Jesus discredits him, too. All of us have Thomas moment. All of us questioned our faith at certain point of our

lives. I remember very well when I did my Ph.D. degree in Old Testament; my program was very intellectual. There was no room for spirituality and faith. Yes, I attended Lutheran school of theology at Chicago, but I was taught and trained to be intellectual and critical when I read the Bible. At that time, my sister suffered from cancer and died. I reached a point when I doubted almost everything the church has been teaching like the Trinity, angels, virgin birth, and many more. I experienced a spiritual crisis. I was miserable. In the midst of my spiritual struggle, Jesus confronted me through my friend who was attending the same program. Gradually, I experienced a gentle spiritual awakening. Jesus came to me through my friend as he came to Thomas. As a result, my relationship with Jesus is deeper. If Jesus had not confronted me, I would have not stood here and preached this sermon.

The story of Thomas teaches me not to be afraid of questioning my faith and be critical. Yes, it is okay to question your faith. Questions are actually a sign of growth not weakness. But remember this; answered questions that lead to faith are the true answers. The answer that leads you to Christ is the true answer.

Jesus transformed Thomas' life. He is no longer doubting Thomas but Thomas, the believer. Thomas was a critical thinker. He was intellectual and Jesus did not

discredit him. His faith in Jesus who is no longer among the dead freed him from his doubt and fear. He responded to Jesus resurrection by acknowledging him as his Lord and his God. He became a very well known Apostle in India. He tolerated persecution for the sake of Jesus Christ. According to Syriac Christian tradition, the Apostle Thomas was allegedly killed in 72 C.E. He accepted martyrdom because he firmly believed that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He would not have risked his life for the sake of Jesus, if Jesus is dead and not alive. Thomas the believer not doubting Thomas took his faith seriously. Because Thomas and the rest of the disciples believed the resurrection, we believe it, too. Our faith is based on their faith.

We live in a time when it is difficult to be serious believers in Jesus Christ. It is easy to be a nominal believer as long as your faith does not get in anybody's face, or affect how you will vote, or spend your money, or set up your priority. The faith of the disciples has changed the world. Their faith was serious. What about your faith? The Apostle Thomas' faith changed the world. What about your faith?

The disciples were afraid of the Jews; so they were afraid to leave the room. Their leader was killed. They were grieving and shocked. They were also disappointed.

The disciples who are going to evangelize the world would have had shut up for good. They could keep silent about Jesus' resurrection, but they didn't because Jesus was raised from the dead and the disciples believed it, and they were willing to endanger their lives for this fact. They left the room with Thomas and shared the good news of the resurrection.

The story of Thomas teaches us that the resurrection is true. It also teaches us that Christ is walking with us. I want to confront you with one reality. Jesus Christ is not dead. He is alive, and he comes to confront you today not saying: you are questioners, or skeptical, or you disappointed me. He didn't say that to Thomas, so he will not say it to you. He comes to confront you today saying: "peace be with you."