



## Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald  
8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF  
Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com  
[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



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**SERMON**

**Rev Dr André Groenewald**

**READING**

**John 20:19-31**

**The text for the sermon is verse 25:**

<sup>25</sup> *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"*

*But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."*

A lot of people who read this text for the first time judge Thomas as being stupid to be so doubtful of Jesus' resurrection. How can He doubt the resurrection of Jesus?

Today I want to ponder on the question: Why not?

But first let's explore the background of the passage. John tells us about two appearances of Jesus - the first one being when the disciples, except Thomas, were all together in Jerusalem.

The disciples would remain inside the house to mourn the death of Jesus. It is only later that we hear that Thomas was not with them. But the disciples at this point of the story were still gripped with fear. They were still terrified that security forces would find them. After all, their enemies found Jesus at night and came after him with torches and weapons. Everyone was still celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread which meant that none of them would have left Jerusalem for Galilee yet. Proper residences were equipped with bolts and locks. Bolted doors would prevent anyone from entering, unless one could walk through closed doors like Jesus did. Jesus' appearance in the locked room suggests a resurrection body from divine nature. Jesus greeted them with the standard Jewish greeting: "Peace be with you". Then He showed them the signs of his crucifixion.

Wounds were sometimes shown as evidence in court; here their function is to identify that it is the same Jesus who died. In much of Jewish tradition, the dead would be resurrected in the same form in which they died before God healed them, so that everyone would recognize that the person who stood before them was the same one who had died. "Hands" includes one's wrists, which was where the spikes would have been driven; a nail through the palm

would not have secured the person in place on the cross, since the victim's weight would have ripped the hand open.

In Jewish tradition prophets often appointed their successors. Now Jesus appoints them to be his messengers on earth.

Then Jesus breathed on them. His breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life. Jewish literature especially connected the Holy Spirit with the power to prophesy, or speak for God. Acting as God's messengers or agents the disciples could pronounce the divine prerogative on his authority.

But Thomas, the other disciple who was not with them, did not believe them.

Then a week later they were all together again, even Thomas. The feast was over and the disciples would thus soon be ready to return to Galilee unless they received orders to the contrary.

And again for the second time, Jesus appeared through the locked door. And when Thomas was convinced that it was really Jesus he confesses to him: My Lord and my God!

We cannot judge Thomas. We of all people that live in today's world know all about doubt.

We live in a rational society where we rather have doubt than faith, suspicion more than trust, more hatred than love and yes negativity more than hope....We have so many excuses **why** we do not see the hand of God that we totally lose track of the things which He alone makes possible like:  
Can a human "create" heaven and earth?  
Can a human make another human being?  
Can any human being without the help of God sing praises when facing death?

No I am afraid not.

Christ is amongst us today visible and real just as He was with his disciples and Thomas so many centuries ago. How? Well He brought these parents here today. He led them through many journeys together. He gave them children to realize their need for his presence in their lives. He made a miracle possible for us all to see.

Chance - coincidence. No way. Only God can do these things.

The worse is when people **do see** but still not believe! There is no one as blind as the one who refuses to see. I suppose the same is true about our FAITH in Jesus Christ. We know He was resurrected like Thomas but we still want proof. We believe that God is present amongst us but still we are looking for signs.

Now I am just wondering how many more signs do we need?

In this ungodly society that we live in, there are still good people making a difference – ordinary people like you and me – people that give so much of themselves for the good of others. People who are moved by God's Holy Spirit!

You and I can tell many stories of people who died with smiles on their faces - our relatives who died with grace and in peace - people who knew that the Lord has overpowered death.

In this world that we live in with more questions than answers the Lord God is still answering our prayers by providing for our every need like giving us our daily bread.

But I guess we all doubt at times because we are sinful human beings that are so fragile. We do not live in a perfect world and we are not perfect either. But this makes life exciting. We must admit that it is much nicer to hear positive stories than the negative and bad ones. Maybe we must restrain ourselves from negative stories and negative people and negative circumstances and rise above it without judging or patronizing others! I mean I once heard the story of the woman who was driving past a blind woman who was standing waiting for the bus to arrive while it was pouring with rain, to realize only later that the bus drivers were on strike. She turned around, although she had to attend an important meeting, and helped the blind woman. I am sure we can tell a lot more of these good stories.

Maybe we must take a stance and decide; I am going to show the world through my positive actions that I know God exists! Maybe then we will be able to turn the tide of doubt and negativity into one of positiveness and love...

Amen

## Gospel

### John 20:19-31: “Who was Thomas?”

**Thomas**, one of the twelve disciples or apostles of Jesus, called ‘Didymus’ (MEANING ‘twin’) in the Gospel of John (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). He appears in each of the apostolic lists (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Receiving little mention in the synoptic Gospels, Thomas becomes important in the later portions of John’s Gospel. He alone appears to be a tower of strength when he encourages the disciples to accompany Jesus into a hostile Judea even if it means death (John 11:16). He appears to be without understanding when, in John 14:5, he confesses his ignorance about where Jesus is going and therefore finds it difficult to follow him. He is most commonly remembered as the ‘doubting Thomas’ who refused to believe in Jesus’ resurrection until he saw the scars and was invited to place his fingers where the nails were driven and his hand into Jesus’ side (John 20:24-29). The story stands as a paradigm for all Christians who are called to believe in Christ without having seen him or having been granted tangible proof of his existence (:29). Thomas’s response is that of all who later believe: ‘My Lord and my God!’ (:28). In John 21:1-14, Thomas is one of the small group of disciples who go fishing and then see the risen Lord. Little is known about Thomas’s activities after the crucifixion of Jesus. He is recorded as among those gathered in the upper room after the ascension (Acts 1:13). Thereafter, tradition preserves only legendary stories of little apparent historical value. (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary*. 1st ed. San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985, S. 1066)

### Prayer

Glorious risen Lord,  
we pray for your Church,  
inheritors of the resurrection witness.  
Give to all Christians the strength and conviction  
to tell of your life-changing love.  
Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega  
the beginning and the end  
hear our prayers.  
Amen