

The Fourth Sunday in Advent/St. Thomas, Apostle – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. John 20:24-29: “We Believe, and so We Speak.”  
December 20/21, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty and ever-living God, You strengthened Your apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in the resurrection of Your Son. Grant us such faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that we may never be found wanting in Your sight; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Treasury of Daily Prayer*, CPH 2008, p. 1038)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is written in the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, beginning with the twenty-fourth verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.” / Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (*ESV*)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who contrary to all reason was born in a Bethlehem stable, and who gave up His life on the cross in payment for sin before rising from the dead on the third day, dear fellow redeemed:

“Every football team is the same—whether in Iowa or Minnesota or Wisconsin or Illinois—so any one is just as good as another.” “It doesn’t matter which politician you vote for, as long as you vote for someone.” “Whether you work hard to buy what you have, or whether you beg, borrow, or steal to get it, we’re all just trying to get to the same place.” I don’t think you would accept any of these statements as true. In fact, they are ridiculous. Of course not all football teams are the same. Not all politicians will get our vote. And it certainly does matter how we acquire our money.

But as ridiculous as these statements are, they are the way that people commonly talk about religion. “Every religion is the same; they all lead to the same god—one is just as good as another.” “It doesn’t matter what church you go to, as long as you go to church.” “No matter what you believe, we are all trying to get to the same place. What’s important is that you just believe in something.”

Let's apply this thinking to today's reading. Jesus appeared alive to the disciples while Thomas was away on the third day after His death. He showed them the marks in His hands and side. He asked them to give Him something to eat. He breathed on them and blessed them. There was no doubt about it-Jesus had risen bodily from the dead just as He promised He would. Then Thomas came along. What did the disciples say? "Thomas, Jesus appeared to us in the flesh. But it doesn't really matter if you believe it or not, as long as you hold Him in your heart. We're not here to force our beliefs on you; you can decide for yourself, and that's all right with God."

Not quite. No matter how much Thomas denied what they were saying, either from pride or from hurt feelings, they did not stop proclaiming the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was a fact, even if Thomas or anyone else rejected it. Whether it agreed with their natural sensibilities or not, Jesus had risen. This proved that He was no regular man. He was the Son of God in the flesh, which means He is our Savior and the Savior of the whole world.

It matters what we believe about Jesus. One belief about Him is not just as good as another. The ten disciples believed that Jesus had risen; Thomas did not. That meant that Thomas actually followed a different Jesus. He followed a Jesus who taught many things and performed many miracles, but who unfortunately met an untimely death and was buried. That was Jesus for Thomas-no Jesus who could actually save.

But then Jesus appeared again to the disciples and called Thomas back from his unbelief. Jesus proved He had heard every word that Thomas had spoken by presenting His hands and side for Thomas to see and touch. He then spoke some pointed words to Thomas: "*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*" Thomas had a wrong idea about faith. He thought that faith depended on his demands being met by God, on his being personally convinced by his own standards. Jesus showed him that faith means trusting what God says, whether or not there is any physical or tangible proof.

It is common to hear people say, "Seeing is believing." But Jesus says the opposite. He says, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" If you can see something, you don't need to "take it on faith." It is when you cannot see something, when you have not witnessed or experienced it for yourself, that faith is required. This is how Hebrews 11 defines faith: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (v. 1).

This does not mean that faith has nothing to go by. Faith stands on the inspired, powerful Word of God. We trust what He tells us. We trust what He tells us about ourselves, and what He tells us about Himself. He tells us that He created us to be perfect masters of His creation, but that Adam and Eve gave up their perfection by doing what He commanded them not to do. This plunged the whole world into sin, sin that is passed down from generation to generation. If God did not tell us how far we had fallen short of His glory, we would think we were not far from Him. He tells us that apart from Him, we are dead in our sins.

But He also tells us that He loves us and desires our salvation. God the Father sent His only-begotten Son to take on our flesh and redeem us from our sins. God could not just overlook sin. Sin required payment, and Jesus offered up His holy life on our behalf as that payment. On the third day, He rose from the dead to prove that His work to redeem sinners was complete. He tells us that "*whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (Joh. 3:16).

But where did this faith that brings you forgiveness and eternal life come from? How did you get it? Your faith is not a reflection of a better heart. It is not a decision you made to let Jesus into your life. Your faith is a gift from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the inspired Apostle writes, *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ"* (Rom. 10:17), and, *"this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"* (Eph. 2:8).

God gave this same gracious gift to doubting Thomas, and Thomas responded with the humble and clear confession: *"My Lord and my God!"* He acknowledged that Jesus is who He said He is and who the other disciples testified that He is—the eternal Son of God who had won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Once Thomas believed, he spoke. If tradition is accurate, he took the Gospel message of Jesus' atoning death and glorious resurrection as a missionary to India, and was later martyred for preaching Christ, receiving the crown of life given to all who are faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

Faith is not something for us to keep hidden. It is not a secret we have that we keep between us and God. Faith is active in what we say and how we live. John the Baptizer is a great example of this. He had the opportunity to get glory for himself. People crowded around him asking if he was the great prophet Elijah or even the Christ Himself. The evangelist John recorded his answer: *"He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' ... [B]ut among you stands One you do not know, even He who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie"* (Joh. 1:20, 26-27).

This is what faith does: it grabs hold of the Lord's promises and points to Him and wants to live for Him. We Christians show our faith by telling the whole world the hope we have. We tell others that "God sent His Son to save me and you! He died to pay for our sins. He rose in victory over death. He still comes through His Word to give us His blessings. And He is coming back in glory to take us to be with Him forever." No religion has such a hopeful, joyful message as Christianity. But even within Christianity, not every church points to Jesus alone for salvation.

It does matter what church you go to. It matters what your church teaches. Do we teach that the Bible is a mixture of human and divine thoughts, and that we have to determine what is true and what isn't? Or do we teach that the Bible is the Word of God, totally trustworthy, accurate in every detail, which has authority over every aspect of our lives? This is why we are compelled to speak. It is our duty like John to confess, and not deny, but confess the truth of God.

This matters! We don't have permission from God to keep our mouths shut when the truth is being challenged or attacked. It is certainly intimidating when this happens. It is very hard to stand against the crowd. It is hard to open our mouths when we expect that people won't want to hear it. But if we stop opening our mouths and sharing what God has done for us, who will ever believe? *"Faith comes from hearing... the word of Christ."*

The best way to be prepared to speak, to confess the saving name of Jesus in every circumstance, is to keep hearing, learning, and studying the Word of God. The Holy Spirit works through the Word, strengthening us, comforting us, and giving us the conviction and courage to tell others what God has done for sinners. You can probably think, as I can, of opportunities to confess the truth that you missed, that you wish you could have back. You feel guilty that you stayed silent when you should have spoken.

Jesus forgives you that sin—your doubts, your weaknesses, and your fears. He died on the cross for you, and gave His holy blood to wash away every one of your sins. Your failures in the past do not disqualify you from the needs of the present. He gives you grace for today, grace to believe in Him, and grace to speak the glad tidings of salvation to the people around you who need to hear it. Believing and speaking go together like breathing in and breathing out. We breathe in the rich blessings of God through His Word, and we breathe out these blessings to others.

It is not our job to convert anyone; we can't *make* someone believe. The disciples did not succeed in convincing Thomas of the truth in the seven days between Jesus' appearances. Converting hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit. That takes the pressure off us. Our calling is faithfully to confess what God has done for us and all people. As He has freely given to us, we freely give to others. **We Believe, and so We Speak.**

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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