

# St. Matthew's Church

## NEW YORK CITY

### CLEAR AS THE LIGHT OF DAY

John 20:19-31

Second Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2009

**Introduction:** The Gospel lesson from the Book of John has these amazing words; “Now Thomas (called Didymus), was not with the disciples when Jesus came.” All of us deal with our emotions differently, and perhaps Thomas’s grief had driven him to go elsewhere to be by himself. We know he was not a coward because, when Jesus proposed going to Bethany, after the news of Lazarus’s illness, Thomas was the man who had said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” He was willing to suffer and die for Jesus. And he meant it, he never lacked for courage, but he was a natural pessimist. What he had expected had happened, and when it did, he probably simply broke down under the pressure of the last few days, and his way of dealing with problems was to be alone. He also was not one to act like he believed when he really did not. So when the other disciples approached him saying, “We have seen the Lord!” Thomas answered: “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.”

Some say Thomas spoke for the whole world: “Give me proof and I’ll believe!” I am not so sure. I think the world’s view is more like, “Show me the facts, and I’ll invent another theory.” Many years ago I read Hugh Schoenfeld’s “The Passover Plot,” which popularized the ancient swoon theory. The view claims Jesus had not actually died but was unconscious when placed in the tomb. While He lay comatose, the spices and linen bandages provided a helpful dressing for his injuries. Finally the dampness of the tomb revived Him and allowed the perpetration of the resurrection hoax. They are ignoring the fact that Jesus was taken down from the cross and carried to Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb without any sign of life. But the swoon theorist say that after Jesus lay in the tomb for many hours, He is revived by its icy chill at which time He extricated himself from the bandages, arranged them neatly for the viewer, pushed the stone away, eluded the guards who were bound by threat of death to keep the imperial seal from being broken, and then, after clothing himself, spent the day and

evening playing ghost. Now my brothers and sisters I tell you it would take more faith to believe that than it would take to believe in the resurrection of Christ.

Others say the body was stolen by either Christ's enemies or his disciples. Either alternative is a psychological absurdity. His enemies would not have wanted to encourage belief in His resurrection, and his disciples could never have accomplished it. Besides, they not only believed and preached the Resurrection, but died for it. Who would die for a lie? The difficulties of belief may be great for some, but the absurdities of unbelief are even greater.

**The Remedy for Disbelief:** Praise God, there was a remedy for Thomas, and there is a remedy for us. John's Gospel tells us this: "A week later [Jesus'] 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.' 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.' Thomas answered Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

Jesus came to Thomas in the midst of the community, and he came first with the word of peace. Thomas could see Jesus shining before him, "Thomas, you can reach out and touch me." Thomas needed no such tangible evidence, Jesus is alive: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas may have been slow to believe, but he was not slow to grasp the implications of Christ's resurrection. Jesus was not only his Lord but his God. The evidence was palpable, substantive, and clear. Thomas's faith in the resurrection was as clear as the light of day!

What about us? The evidence is still just as substantive, just as palpable, and just as clear. "Then Jesus told him; 'because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" We can be part of that blessed company. It is not a ship of fools. We have the prophetic Scriptures to confirm our faith and we have the testimony of resurrected lives.

Erasmus, the tremendously gifted German scholar, wrote in the preface of the *Textus Receptus*, the first Greek Testament ever published and the one that is the basis for the translation of the King James Version, these words: "On these pages you will see the face of Jesus. You will see the Lord Himself, the whole Christ, more fully and more completely than if He stood

in the flesh before you.” We see Jesus in the Holy Scriptures as clear as the light of day.

Jesus is with us in all our trials and disappointments. The Book of Job ends with these words of the great patriarch; “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye sees thee.” Trial and frustration and disappointment and sorrow bring to us a feeling and sensitivity to the nearness of Christ. Jesus is alive it is as clear as the light of day.

Jesus is with us in our loneliness. You are never by yourself. I suppose John thought that he was alone when he was exiled to Patmos, there to die. Turning to hear the great voice that spoke behind him, he looked upon the Lord Jesus. In our loneliness, He is always present. He is with us; Jesus is alive and it is as clear as the light of day.

We have been given the gift and power of God for healing ourselves, our households, our friendships, and our world. The power of forgiveness is with all who have bumped into Jesus along the way, the power to speak peace to all who face the burden of reality, the harshness of sin in themselves. The words “I declare to you the gracious forgiveness of all your sin” belong to every Christian. We are the peaceful peacemakers, the forgiven forgiveness-sharers. The power of God’s healing lives in us. And in it we see Jesus, just as clear as the light of day!

The Lord pronounced a final beatitude on these who do not see and yet believe. We have great joy now and will someday share in the likeness of His resurrection. In the words of Joni Eareckson Tada, “I know the meaning of that now. It’s the time after my death when I’ll be on my feet dancing.” For her the resurrection was as clear as the light of day. What about you do you have that light of hope in your soul. My brother, my sister, do this: look and live, believe and be saved, wash and be made clean. Jesus is the resurrection and the life and it is yours for the asking.

Safe in the arms of Jesus,  
Safe on His gentle breast  
There by His love o’ershaded.  
Sweetly my soul shall rest.