

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on April 28, 2019 (Easter 2, Year C)

Perhaps you've heard of the acronym FOMO, which stands for Fear of Missing Out. It's the idea, or the worry really, that others are having amazing experiences that you're missing out on. It's not entirely new — frankly, I think it's hardwired into the human condition. Adam and Eve ate of the apple in the Garden of Eden because they were convinced by the serpent they were missing out on wisdom. And it's basically the modern equivalent of “keeping up with the Joneses.” You know the story — your neighbor gets the latest Tesla sports car — in bright red no less — and suddenly your late model Volkswagen Jetta seems a bit...lame.

Which brings us to Thomas. Thomas, the much maligned doubter, didn't just experience the *fear* of missing out, he *did* miss out. For some reason, Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Scripture doesn't tell us *where* Thomas was exactly. Maybe he had a dentist appointment or a hot date. Who knows? My guess is that he was so consumed with grief that he just couldn't face being with his closest friends in those early days following the crucifixion. That Jesus' death was so raw and so painful, that he just needed to be alone for awhile. But whatever the reason, Thomas missed Jesus' post-resurrection appearance and had to rely on the eyewitness report of the other disciples.

And even more than the fear of missing out, this must have broken Thomas' heart; to have missed the risen Messiah; to have been the only one of Jesus' inner circle not to have been there; to have been self-marginalized by his own absence. And as a result, Thomas is not quite as far along emotionally and spiritually as the rest of his friends.

And this makes sense. Because as joyful as Easter is, there's always a bit of emotional whiplash moving so quickly from the agony of the cross on Good Friday to the unfettered joy of the empty tomb on Easter Day. Thomas stands as a bridge for us between the grief of Good Friday and the joy of Easter.

Karoline Lewis, a preaching professor at a Lutheran seminary in Minnesota, with whom I'm friends on Facebook says that Thomas “helps us to linger, just a little bit, just for a little while; to remember that the grief was real.”

And I really think she's on to something here. Because the story of Thomas does allow us to linger a bit longer in the grief, before racing off to the joy. To linger at the foot of the cross before encountering the lilies and egg hunts and chocolate bunnies. A reminder that grief is never linear, but acts more like an emotional spiral. With moments of laughter interspersed with tears; with moments of confusion mingled with clarity.

On Thursday night, I gathered at the home of longtime parishioner Edie Earle, along with Fr. Robert and Edie's five children. We sat around her deathbed in the house her children had all grown up in, and for the next couple of hours we prayed and laughed and cried and told stories about this amazing 96-year-old woman. And, truth be told, we also toasted her and drank a little bourbon in her honor. Edie died peacefully the next morning at 6:00 am, surrounded by her children, just as the sun arose.

But I mention this, because, this must have been something of what the disciples experienced — at least in the mix of emotions that accompany death. Because despite that incredibly dramatic moment at the

Easter Vigil when all the lights come on and the Easter acclamation is proclaimed, the *emotions* surrounding the resurrection weren't like a light switch suddenly being tripped. There was confusion and fear and elation and, yes, grief. Because even when it all sunk in, the relationship with Jesus, their Lord and friend and master, was indelibly and undeniably changed by the resurrection. Things would be different. The journey of faith would change directions. A new path would emerge. And change, as wonderful as it may be, does inevitably lead to grief. We mourn the loss of the way things used to be, even as we joyfully embrace the future.

And I find this sense of lingering in the midst of grief particularly poignant in light of the Easter Day massacre in Sri Lanka. The news that over 350 of our fellow siblings in Christ were murdered while celebrating the resurrection, the very same thing we were doing in safety here in Hingham, was both devastating and heartbreaking. And it couldn't help but cast a pall over our own celebration. We are one body, one spirit in the risen Christ. And when one part of the body is broken, we are all affected. We are all aggrieved.

Which brings us to doubt. Doubt is not a dirty word. It's often treated as such in church circles. At least implicitly. Something no one dares talk about at coffee hour. Maybe in the quiet confines of their priest's office. Maybe. But it just doesn't really fit in with the whole happy ethos of sharing the peace. It certainly doesn't pair well with Eastertide, this 50-day season full of joyful alleluias.

And yet, year after year Thomas shows up on *the very Sunday after Easter*, expressing doubts about the resurrection. And this is such an important reminder that authentic faith, a faith truly rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is not about plastered-on smiles, but about the full range of human emotions. Which most certainly includes doubt.

Because doubt, rather than something to be suppressed, plays a vital role in a healthy, vibrant, and living faith. And I think that's so freeing to realize, because so often in church circles, we're taught to crush our doubts rather than to embrace them; to deny our doubts rather than acknowledge them.

Which is precisely why I love Thomas and the prominent role he plays in the midst of our Easter celebration. Because there is something comforting about the fact that even an apostle of Jesus, one of the twelve, had serious doubts about his faith. Words were nice, the testimony of his friends were fine but Thomas wanted *proof*. He didn't just fall into line with the others and plaster a smile upon his face. He was true to himself, authentic in his skepticism, not afraid to raise his objections. Thomas speaks for all of us who, even as we belt out Easter hymns and affirm our faith in the ancient creeds, can't help but say "wait a minute, I have a few questions." And for that we can give thanks. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe."

Which brings us to baptism. In a few moments, we will baptize four children. Which, although we discourage flash photography, if any pictures end up on social media will surely cause some FOMO moments for all your friends and family not able to be here. But more importantly, don't let these children miss out on knowing God. Model for them that, like Thomas, it's okay to have doubts about your faith. But also model for them that Jesus never has doubts about *them*. That he is with them in all the moments of grief and in all the moments of joy. That's the good news of the resurrection; that's the good news of Thomas showing up seven days later. That's the good news of our continuing Easter celebration.