

Years ago, Monroe Parker was traveling through South Alabama on one of those hot, Alabama days. He stopped at a watermelon stand, picked out a watermelon, and asked the how much it cost. "It's \$1.10," he replied. Parker dug into his pocket, found only a bill and said, *"All I have is a dollar."* *"That's ok," the proprietor said, "I'll trust you for it."* "Well, that's mighty nice of you," Parker responded, and picking up the watermelon, started to leave. "Hey, where are you going?" the man behind the counter demanded. "I'm going outside to eat my watermelon," said Parker. "But you forgot to give me the dollar!" the proprietor protested. "You said you would trust me for it," Parker called back. "Yeah," said the proprietor, "but I meant I would trust you for the dime!" "Mack," Parker replied, *"You weren't going to trust me at all. You were just going to take a ten-cent gamble on my integrity!"*

What does it mean to trust somebody? What does it mean to put your faith in them?

Jack Lemmon is recognized as one of America's most talented, appealing, accomplished actors. Those who have met him claim that he is also a humble, modest, good-natured man. One of Lemmon's favorite pastimes is golfing, and he loves to tell stories about his greatest exploits on the links. Jack and Clint Eastwood paired up once with a couple of golf pros for a friendly round. The sixteenth hole of this particular golf course was bordered on one side by the ocean. Jack hit the ball sharply, but it went over the edge and fell toward the water. It landed on a plant outcropping. Jack was going to leave the ball there and take the consequences, but Clint insisted that he hit it. Jack protested that if he leaned over the side of the 80-foot cliff and tried to hit his ball, he would surely fall to his death. Clint promised that he wouldn't let his friend get hurt. He grabbed Jack by the back of his pants and lead him over to the edge of the cliff. The two golf pros, along with Clint Eastwood, formed a human chain to hold onto Jack Lemmon as he leaned over the side of the cliff and hit his ball. **DUE TO HIS TRUST IN HIS FRIENDS, IT LANDED RIGHT ON THE GREEN.** How many people do you know that you would trust anyone to hold you out over an 80-foot cliff?

TRUST IS WHAT IS AT STAKE IN OUR LESSON IN TODAY'S GOSPEL.

Thomas (also called Didymus) was one of Jesus' disciples. Thomas is only mentioned a few times in the Scriptures. On one occasion he showed great courage. In John 11, Jesus is headed back to Judea to see Mary and Martha after He hears about their brother Lazarus' death. The religious leaders in Judea are out for Jesus' blood. Thomas is the one who steps forward and commits himself to going with Jesus back to Judea, even though they all fear it will mean their death. **As Thomas says in verse 16, ". . . Let us go also, that we may die with him."**

If we were to stop here, we would say that Thomas trusted Jesus wholeheartedly, no reservation. He sounds intense. **He will follow Jesus even if it means death.**

Intense would be a good word to describe Thomas the second time we encounter him in the Scriptures. In John 14: 1ff, we read one of the most famous passages in the New Testament. Jesus says to his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you? And when I prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be. And you know the way where I am going." **It is Thomas who says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"**

Thomas is having trouble here with some of Jesus' teachings. What does Jesus mean about preparing a place for them?

The trouble Thomas is having with Jesus' teaching prepares us for the third encounter we have with Thomas in TODAY'S GOSPEL. This was after the resurrection. Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus revealed himself to them. So, the other disciples told him, *"We have seen the Lord!"* **But Thomas 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."**

YES, THOMAS HAD TROUBLE BELIEVING THE TRUTH ABOUT EASTER.

That's why, when Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for them, Thomas answered, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Thomas was having trouble with the idea of life beyond the grave. Thomas was having difficulty believing that death can be conquered, even by Christ.

In 1997 Scripps Howard News Service profiled former lawyer James Kelley of Washington, D.C. Kelley is one of a small group at his local church who are enthusiastic Episcopalians **but who do not believe in God**. Said Kelley, "We all love the incense, the stained-glass windows, the organ music, the vestments, and all of that. It's drama. It's aesthetics. It's the ritual. That's neat stuff. *I don't want to give all that up, just because I don't believe in God.*"

Thomas believed in God. Thomas even believed in Jesus. He was part of the fellowship, he was one of the chosen twelve. But Thomas could not make that final leap of faith to believe that a human being can be raised from the dead. Even when the other disciples, his friends, his colleagues, people he knew and trusted reported they had seen Christ, Thomas refused to believe. *"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."* Thomas was willing to give his life for Jesus, but he could not believe in Christ's resurrection.

MANY PEOPLE IN THE PAST, AND MANY PEOPLE TODAY ARE IN THOMAS' SHOES. Some refuse even to believe in God. No matter how compelling the evidence might be to the rest of us--even in the face of the magnificence of creation--**some people refuse to believe there is a Creator.**

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing on a lake in Scotland when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat high into the air. Then it opened its mouth to swallow both the fisherman and his boat. As the man sailed head over heels, he cried out, *"Oh, my God! Help me!"* **At once, the ferocious attack scene froze in place, and as the atheist hung in mid-air, a booming voice came down from the clouds, "I thought you didn't believe in Me!" "Come on God, give me a break!" the man pleaded. "Two minutes ago, I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either."**

Some people refuse to believe even the most basic truth about life, and that is that there is a Divine Creator. Others believe in God, but cannot bring themselves to believe in Jesus. While still others, like Thomas, believe in God and profess to follow Jesus, but have closed the door of their minds on the subject of the resurrection. For Thomas nothing would do except to see for himself the nail marks in Christ's hands and to put his finger where the nails had been, and to put his hand into Christ's side. And when he had done all this, when his doubts were finally put to rest, Thomas was overcome with emotion. He cried out, "My Lord and my God!" No longer was Thomas on the outside looking in. **Now he was a believer as well.**

In his book, *Some Things I Have Learned Since I Knew It All*, Jerry Cook tells about having open-heart surgery. Jerry was pastor of a large church in Oregon that believed in and practiced healing when he had his heart attack. During his recovery a woman in his church asked him, "Were you embarrassed to have a heart attack?" Jerry replied that he was not embarrassed. But the woman was. She was unable to handle the totality of life's experiences--including the fact that pain and suffering are real.

Later, after he recovered, Jerry had a visit from a man who was fearfully facing the prospect of his own bypass surgery. "I want to see your scars," the man said shyly.

Jerry took off his shirt. The man gently traced with his finger the violet scar that ran vertically down Jerry's chest. The man went on, "The doctor says the most painful part of the operation will be the surgery on my legs. They're going to take out veins from my calf to use in the heart bypass." Looking up at Jerry, he asked, "Can I see your legs?" Jerry rolled up his pants. The man got on his knees. Without shame, he put his hands on Jerry's legs, touching the scars with his finger. When he rose to his feet, there were tears in his eyes. "Thank you," he said. "Now I have hope."

Seeing and touching the scars gave him hope. **Touching Jesus' scars gave Thomas hope--HOPE about the meaning of his life--hope that life really does matter--hope that we are not here merely for a moment and then forever gone as if we had never existed--hope that the Easter story is true. Christ is alive. Death has been conquered. DID YOU HEAR ME... "DEATH HAS BEEN CONQUERED!"**

Anyone who has seen the movie Apollo 13 can't help but be inspired by the grit, genius, and determination of all those involved in the early pioneering adventures into space. The movie follows the incredible, true story of the astronauts who are stranded in a crippled spacecraft. It is only through cooperation, hard work, dedication, and the grace of God that the astronauts ever made it back safely. At one point in the movie, the astronauts have to leave the main spacecraft and set up shop in a landing module. The landing module is only meant for temporary, short-term use, and soon its air filter gives out, leaving the astronauts with only hours of breathable air. They will suffocate if they can't find a solution to the broken air filter.

A group of NASA scientists on the ground begin working frantically to construct a functioning air filter out of only those components that would be available to the astronauts on the ship. **Finally, they cobble together a workable filter out of such things as duct tape and socks.** They're pretty sure it will work, but no one can say for certain. When the scientists rush in and present their awkward invention to the project director, he isn't quick to accept it. One of his advisors rejects the air filter entirely. The success or failure of this filter would decide the success or failure of the space mission. **And it would mean the difference between life and death for the astronauts.** One of the younger scientists' steps forward and says, *"Sir, we don't know if it will work or not. We believe it will, and right now, that's all those men up there have. Sometimes," he adds, "you have to have faith."*

As we know, the air filter worked, the astronauts survived, and they made it back to Earth in one piece. **But their story might have turned out very differently if they had not been willing to TRUST, if they had not had FAITH in themselves and others who were working with them and caring for them.**

THOMAS HAD TROUBLE 'BELIEVING' THE STORY OF HIS FRIENDS. HE HAD TO EXPERIENCE THE "RISEN CHRIST" FOR HIMSELF.

TODAY, THERE IS SOMEONE IN THIS ROOM FOR WHOM THE "Easter Story" is still Somewhat UNREAL! MAYBE someone you love has been taken from you, and you have never let go and trusted God with that loved one's care. Someone in this room is still making his or her decisions as if there were no eternity to consider.

All I can say to you is that we have the testimony of men and women who had their lives radically changed by their experience of the risen Christ. **Among those was Thomas himself.**

After TODAY'S READING, Thomas is with the other disciples in a fishing boat.

IT IS THEN THAT THE RISEN CHRIST SAYS TO THEM... *"Cast your nets on the other side."* My guess is that Thomas was the first one to cast the nets.

NO LONGER IS THOMAS A "DOUBTER."

The last time we encounter Thomas in Scripture, he is in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

But the story doesn't end there. Thomas was so convinced that he had seen the risen Christ that he died a martyr's death. Tradition tells us that Thomas was run through the body with a SPEAR at Coromandel in the East Indies.

IT IS HERE THAT WE LEARN THAT HE "GLADLY" DIED FOR THAT WHICH HE ONCE "DOUBTED." FOR THOMAS BECAME A "BELIEVER." HOW?

- Thomas learned to TRUST the testimony of people he respected.
- Thomas learned to TRUST the Master whom he followed.
- Thomas learned to TRUST God who gives life both in this world and the next.
- How about you? Have you learned to TRUST like that?

TRUST THE GOOD NEWS, HE HAS RISEN, HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!! Amen.