



Easter 2 – Moving 1 of 4
April 23, 2017
John 20:19-31

Moving: He's Moving Me Toward Transformation



Take a stroll downtown, and you'll see a sign in Houdini Plaza that says, "What the eyes see and the ears hear, the mind believes." What, you don't believe me? Ok, here's a picture of the sign. While Harry Houdini gets the credit for this quote, I'm calling him out for plagiarism. This very well could have been said by Thomas. Listen again to Thomas' line from the Gospel, "*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.*"

Before we spend the next fifteen minutes jumping all over Doubting Thomas, let's focus where John would have us focus. At the end of this section, John writes and we just sang, "*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" John also says that if everything was written down about what Jesus did, the whole world wouldn't be a big enough to hold the books. So if John had more than a world's-worth of material to choose from, why did he choose this story of Jesus meeting Thomas as the climax of his Jesus biography? Did John have it in for Thomas? "I want to have him dubbed, 'Doubting Thomas' for the next 2000 years?" No, not at all.

This section isn't primarily about Thomas. It's about Jesus and the way he changes people. Jesus spent three years with his disciples so they knew his teaching. Jesus also went great lengths to make sure that his apostles – the ones he was going to send out into the world – he went to great lengths to make sure they were eyewitnesses of what he did and not just earwitnesses of what he said. What do I mean by that? If the disciples only knew Jesus as a teacher, they would have some tremendous things to share with their listeners. "Love your neighbor as yourself. Don't worry about what you eat or drink. Help the poor. Visit the sick. Turn the other cheek." Wonderful, biblical teachings that change the way we live. But when you see what Jesus did – that he died on the cross, that he rose from the grave -- that doesn't just change the way we live, it changes our life. It transforms our lives. A resurrected Lord guarantees that God the Father accepted the sacrifice that was made for my sins. That's life-changing. A resurrected Lord guarantees that because he lives, I too, shall live. That's life-changing. A resurrected Lord guarantees that Jesus isn't buried in some tomb, but that he is who he claimed to be, the Son of God. As such, that means he's really present in my life today. That's life-changing.

And you say, "You're right. That is life-changing. That is transforming. But... I haven't seen the resurrected Lord." Welcome to Thomas' world. Why should Thomas have believed that Jesus was alive? Because Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and I'll raise it again in three days?" I can say that. Doesn't mean I could do it. Because Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life?" I can say that. Oh, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not downplaying the power or authenticity of Jesus' words. But if Jesus' words weren't backed up by actions, his words would be just that... words. So I get Thomas' slowness to believe. I get his doubt. But this was his downfall, he also refused to listen to witnesses. Jesus showed himself to be alive to the apostles on Easter night, so that they could present a living Jesus to others. And this night of Easter 2, we see Jesus going great lengths to add Thomas as another witness to his team. For forty days, Jesus repeatedly showed himself to the apostles and 500 others, so that they in turn could be credible witnesses to us. Jesus showed himself to them, so that their witness of a living Savior could be a foundation for us. It is not a small thing when we confess in the Nicene Creed, "We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church." We are confessing that the universal group of believers here on earth aren't blindly following the teachings of some rabbi from 2000 years ago. Rather, we are following a death-defying, sin-forgiving, stone-moving, witness-substantiated Jesus. Because Jesus went out of his way to provide a life-changing visit to Thomas and John and all the others, you and I benefit. We now have a life-changing message from them. Through their witness we can be certain that Jesus moved a stone. Therefore, we can also be confident that today he's moving me.

To see how he moves us, we at look how the living Lord moved Thomas. After being convinced that his Lord was alive, Thomas says, "My Lord and my God." I love this confession. Sweet. Simple. Pointed and personal. I especially like that John records it. It's an awesome bookend. John begins his Gospel with the reading we use at Christmas, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Now at the end of the Gospel, John shares Thomas' confession, "My Lord and my God." That's why I and many others would call this the climax of John's Gospel. Jesus' whole time on earth, from womb to tomb, was spent leading people to see him as God. In John 20, we see him achieving his goal. And it's his goal for you. More than anything else, Jesus wants you to see him, treat him, regard him, as God.

And you say, “I do.” I know you do. And I praise God that through the witness of the apostles contained in this book, the Holy Spirit leads you to confess that. But it’s also my prayer that God moves us more and more to understand and appreciate what it means to confess, “My Lord and my God.” As we bask in the afterglow of Easter and worship under this series title, “He Moves Me,” I pray that God moves us more and more to see and live with Jesus as the center of our lives and not simply acknowledge him as a divine being.

What would that look like? What does that look like? College students, in a few weeks you’ll be picking up more hours, hoping to earn enough money this summer to pay at least a good chunk of next semester’s tuition. Yes, God says we should plan our finances. But he also says not to worry. To confess, “My Lord and my God,” gives you confidence that you’re going to be provided for. You may not get everything you think you need. You may not even be able to attend the college you choose. But that’s ok, because you can say this, “Jesus is my Lord. Jesus is my God.” A family member is going through health problems. Yes, God says we should take care of our loved ones and we should tend to the sick. But our minds quickly become consumed with their health, especially if it appears they are heading toward heaven. What does it mean for you to be able to say, “My Lord and my God?” It means God knows your fears. It also means you’re going to be ok because the Lord is with you, even if your loved one isn’t. Pick any challenge facing you today. With that challenge in mind, say Thomas’ confession with me, “My Lord and my God.” Stack that confession next to your challenge. Isn’t it amazing what a difference that makes!

Having Jesus at the center of our lives doesn’t just address the challenges. It transforms how we think and act about every situation and opportunity. I think of the Maundy Thursday sermon. To see Jesus, “My Lord and my God,” with a towel wrapped around his waist washing his disciples’ feet, that leads me to serve others. Or think of the early Christians. They were being persecuted for their faith. Yet what were they known for? Their generosity for the poor. Seeing the mercy of Christ – they couldn’t help but show mercy to others. I saw that last Sunday. In the midst of the 2097 people who worshiped, there was one that never made it in the sanctuary. An obviously needy woman stood outside looking for help. Why did she walk away with a bag of groceries and some gas money? No doubt it was because the worshipers who helped her had just celebrated Christ’s victory and couldn’t help but respond.

How does that transformation, that change in action and attitude consistently occur? How does Jesus move me? That’s what your Ponder Passage is all about. *I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

In view of God’s mercy – that’s the view Thomas got on Easter 2. Some read this account of John and only see Jesus reprimanding Thomas, “Because you see me you believe?” Do yourselves a favor, don’t miss the mercy. Jesus didn’t have to come back for Thomas, but he did. Jesus showed his patience with Thomas. By addressing Thomas’ doubts head on, Jesus let Thomas know, “I know your questions. I know your doubts.” Nobody had to tell Jesus on Wednesday of that week what Thomas’ reaction was from the previous Sunday. Jesus knew. Jesus knows your struggles. He knows your doubts.

I need to confess something. It’s sadly ironic that on the day I wrote this sermon, I was having a conversation with a colleague about some of our congregation-wide ministry efforts. I shared my doubts whether things like Ponder Passages, and personal visits and devotions were going to move 100% of our congregation to live their faith at a new level in all aspects and take advantages of the opportunities God has placed before us. I’m ashamed of those doubts. More importantly, I’m appreciative that my Lord knows my doubts. And he wants to answer my doubts, just like he wants to answer any of your doubts.

He answers our doubts the same way he answered Thomas’. He transforms you the same way he transformed Thomas. He shows us his wounds. If Jesus would have just showed up on earth and said, “Believe in me and obey,” think we’d listen? If God said, “Clean up your life,” would we be transformed? Instead he invites, “Put your finger here. I did that for you... Put your hand here. I did that for you.” Through the witness of the apostles, we don’t just see God. We see, “My God.” We don’t just God, we see a God at our service. How can we but help now to be transformed and serve “my Lord and my God” in every aspect of life. Amen.