

Feast of St. Thomas, the Apostle

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason Glombicki

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Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas, the apostle. This is a “lesser feast,” or, in other words, one that isn’t commonly celebrated. In fact, Thomas’ biblical appearances aren’t that common either. We heard him speak three times in the bible, and all three are in John’s gospel. One of the most famous times is after Jesus’ resurrection when he asked for proof. The first time he spoke was after Jesus heard of Lazarus’ death. Today’s gospel notes the other.

To grasp the importance of Thomas’ words, we should set the stage. This periscope is during Jesus’ final meal. So far, the disciples have had their feet washed by Jesus, they’ve eaten the Last Supper, they’ve been given a command to love one another, and then the disciples started asking Jesus questions. Before Thomas’ question, Simon Peter has already asked where Jesus was going. Although Jesus did not answer Peter directly, Thomas pushed the question. Thomas needed to know where Jesus was going. He wanted the details. He was nervous about the future. After all, moments ago he had witnessed Jesus’ sorrow. He heard of Judas’ betrayal. He learned that Peter would deny Jesus. His world was collapsing. He was uncomfortable. He was anxious.

Don’t we have those feelings all too often? To best understand the story, take a moment to think about what makes you anxious. Maybe, we get anxious about the future. A new diagnosis. Changes in laws or politics. Crime. Healthcare. Terrorism. Refugees. The Illinois budget impasse. A new job. A new neighbor. A new city. Something unexpected. Like Thomas, we sometimes feel like the world is collapsing. We feel uncomfortable. We get anxious.

In today's anxiety, Jesus shares a few words. He says, "Do not let your hearts be distressed" (John 14:1). He goes on to say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Let's pause for a moment. I am. Where have we heard "I AM" in the Hebrew Scriptures? Back in Exodus 3, Moses stood before the burning bush and asked for God's name. God said, "I AM who I AM," so tell the Israelites that I AM has sent you. Back in today's reading from the Christian Scriptures, we find Jesus saying the sixth I AM statement in the book of John. This is important for us as Christians. Here, Jesus argues that I AM, or God, is the way, the truth, and the life. In John, Jesus claims "I AM" as his title. Here, Jesus and God are the I AM.

So, what do we do when we are anxious about the future? How can we respond to the unknown? Jesus says, "Do not be distressed... I AM the way, the truth, and the life." I AM has shown you how to live. I AM the advocate for peace and non-violent resistance. I AM the one who liberates the oppressed. I AM the good shepherd who cares for you. I AM the light and the truth. I AM the bread that feeds your every need. I AM the vine that will support you. I AM the door that welcomes you. And, remember that I AM within the least of these. I AM the sick and the imprisoned. I AM the hungry and the thirsty. I AM the naked and the lonely. I AM the way. I AM the truth. I AM the life. So, do not worry. I AM.

Are you with me? Do you get it? Well, the disciples didn't get it right away. But, I think Thomas eventually got it. You see, we call Thomas an apostle. What does apostle mean? It means an advocate, supporter, ambassador, or, simply, one who is sent. Legend has it that Thomas was one of the five "Apostles of the East." He was the ambassador between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and even further east into India.¹ Thomas was truly sent.

¹ Historical information about St. Thomas taken from: Pfatteicher, Philip H. *New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*. "St. Thomas, Apostle.", p 616-617.

Thomas inspires me. He was a disciple of Jesus. He's unfairly called "doubting Thomas" for his restless, unsatisfied, and probing mind. He sometimes took Jesus too literal for his own good. His anxiety kept him questioning Jesus. Keeping all of that in mind, he was also sent to be a beacon of transformation. He was sent to be an immigrant into the unknown places of the east. He knew that no government, border, law, person, idea, or thing could bring him peace. Instead, he found peace in being sent to embody the I AM.

Thomas's example begs the question, "how are you embodying the I AM?" What does that look like for you this week? For me, I'm trying to embody God's call to immigrate into the unknown places during our "community one-on-one conversations." I'm meeting new people and finding new ideas. I'm noticing how they first encounter our church. I'm surprised that they thank me for asking the questions. In those conversations, I see the embodiment of the I AM in caring for our neighbors.

This week, I pray that you reflect on Thomas' witness. For, we are sent, like Thomas, to be ambassadors for love. We immigrate into the unknown corners of this neighborhood and the world. There, we discover the I AM who lights the path of truth, who guides us along the ways of transformation, and who inspires us to fully live. Thanks be to the great I AM. Amen.