

## THE SKEPTIC AT THE SECOND EASTER SUNDAY SERVICE

John 20:19-31  
April 24, 2022

**Music Leader:** Prayer for the sermon? When finished – look up and say - Where’s Pastor Ron? He’s supposed to be preaching today.

**Deirdre Responds:** **No, he’s not preaching today. Pastor Ron doesn’t like preaching on this particular Sunday. He has some unbelievably bad memories about this particular Sunday. So, he left, but he did say he’d find a replacement.**

**Music Leader:** So, who is his replacement? Are you sure he will be here?

**Deirdre – No DOUBT! I was a little skeptical, but I do believe they will show up. They may be late, but they will get here.**

**Thomas: (From the back of the church)** I’m here, I’m here - I’m a little older now and it takes me longer to get to church. People never let me forget that I lag a little behind others. My name is Thomas or **DOUBTING THOMAS** as some call me. Pastor Ron asked me to take his place today as he has some distressing memories about this particular Sunday. Perhaps he needs a WHM conference to work his way through the pain. He may not have told you that story. But he’s not here, so I’m sure he wouldn’t mind if I told you. Let me have a seat and I’ll fill you in. If he does object, tell him I said that he should not be hiding. But who am I to talk?

Oh good, he left me some notes, I might even use some of them because my memory is not as good as it used to be. **First**, I’ll tell you, Pastor Ron’s story. It happened long ago when he was a student in seminary. One day his New Testament Professor asked him if he would like to preach on “**Low Sunday.**” Pastor Ron was extremely excited about this as students rarely got into the pulpit, and he immediately said yes. When he went home, he searched through his prayer book looking for the Lectionary Readings for **Low Sunday.** He searched that prayer book a dozen times but found no reference to

Low Sunday. He found many saints, St. Andrew, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Matthias, and St Mark; the list was endless and yes, there was even a Saints' day for St. Thomas. It's December 21<sup>st</sup> which is almost as bad as having your birthday fall on Christmas Day. In the Anglican world, they have daily prayers. On my day, the prayer says: "**Almighty and everliving God, who in order to provide more confirmation of the faith did suffer the Holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful about your Son's resurrection.**" Even in their prayers they are never going to let me forget it. Anyway, Pastor Ron did not find **Low Sunday**. Nervously, and with his prayer book in hand, he went back to his Professor and confessed that he did not know where to find the lectionary readings for **Low Sunday**. His Professor burst out laughing, while Ron blushed because he had no idea what was so funny. In utter disbelief, the Professor asked – you've never heard of **Low Sunday**? Pastor Ron sheepishly whispered **No!** The Professor, still laughing, told him that **Low Sunday** was the first Sunday after Easter and seminary students were asked to preach on that day as church attendance was always very low. People flocked to church on Resurrection Sunday, but they must have thought that Jesus went back into the tomb because they didn't come the following Sunday. Some even waited until Christmas to return for another service. Ron made himself a promise that when he had students, he would never ask them to preach on **Low Sunday**. When Pastor Dave asked him to preach this Sunday, Pastor Ron immediately began having flashbacks. As you may know, Pastor Ron would do anything for Pastor Dave, but he just couldn't preach this Sunday. He recruited me for the sermon slot today, so I have come to give my testimony. This is the perfect Sunday for me because John the Apostle writes about an event in my life that happened on my very own **Low Sunday**. It's a true story. In fact, John in his writings told three stories about me.

The **First** was when Jesus' friend Lazarus died, and at the time it was dangerous for Jesus to go anywhere near Jerusalem because the religious leaders were going to kill him. Remember Bethany is just outside Jerusalem where Lazarus' family lived. So, when Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, He stayed where He was, and I was delighted that he did. However, two days later he said: "**Let's go back.**" I thought it was a wrong decision as they wanted to kill him. So, in a moment of

bravery, I said to Jesus and the Disciples: **“Let us also go that we may die with Him.” (John 11:16b)** I wasn’t being foolish, nor did I have a death wish and I knew it would be dangerous for us to go back. But I wanted to show Jesus that I was more courageous than the other disciples. I wanted to show that I was a brave and loyal follower. But I really wasn’t being brave, I wanted to be with Jesus wherever He went. So, we returned to Bethany and the greatest miracle of Jesus’ ministry took place when He raised Lazarus after being dead for four days. I’m so glad I was with Him otherwise I would have missed this incredible event. Then all of us, as a matter of fact the whole countryside got caught up with the Resurrection of Lazarus and there was no more talk of death, only victory and life. We were on the move and soon the whole country would be ours and we would be ruling with Jesus! **Alleluia!**

A week later we were involved in a parade. It was the day after the Sabbath and with Lazarus at our side and Jesus, riding on a donkey, we walked into Jerusalem. Shouting Hosanna and waving palm branches, we had a parade fit for a King-it looked like a **coronation**. Surely this would be the moment when Jesus would declare Himself as the Messiah and begin His rightful reign and we would be there beside Him as the Kingdom of God was ushered in. The infernal rule of Rome would be over, and it would be our turn, this was our beginning. But it was not to be. When we reached the height of the parade, Jesus began weeping and sobbing as if His heart were breaking and He said to those gathered around: **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.” (Lk 19:42)** Nothing changes the dynamics of a celebration more quickly than tears of sorrow shed by the person you are honoring.

Jesus got off the donkey, entered the temple area, and began driving out the vendors. **“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer”; but you have made it a den of robbers.”** (Luke 19:42-46) I realized after these two incidents that Jesus was not going to become King. I was so disappointed because I didn’t understand. One moment it seemed as if Jesus had the world in the palm of His hand then He turned His back, and our hopes and dreams were smashed.

Shortly after this incident, Jesus became very intense and began to talk to us constantly about Him leaving. This is the **second** time John mentioned me in his writings. I can't remember if it took place on the way to the Upper Room or in the Upper Room. All I remember is that Jesus reminded us that he was going to leave. He said: **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”** (John 14:1-4)

When Jesus said this, there was complete silence. It was too late for our hearts not to be troubled for my heart was breaking. I had been with Jesus for almost three years, and I unashamedly admit I loved Him, and He is leaving us? He had probably already told us that He was leaving, but this time, we really heard Him. He was leaving to go and prepare a place for us, and He will come back and get us. Jesus thought that we knew the place where He was going! Truthfully, we had no clue. I know I was tired of Parables and stories, and I wanted a straight answer. So, in my **second** act of courage I said to Him: **“Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”** (John 14:5)

Jesus' response became one of the most well know Scripture verses in the Bible: **“Jesus said: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6-7) At that moment, the denarius finally dropped. I understood that He was the Messiah. I did not understand Him leaving or taking up the cross or laying down His life. I only knew that Jesus was going to get us to the Father which was all that mattered to me.

In many ways, the last week of Jesus' life was a blur. On Monday and Tuesday, we went to the Temple and Jesus taught and was confronted by the religious leaders. Clearing the temple, had angered them. Then on Tuesday the Greeks came looking for

Jesus and I think it was on Tuesday that Judas turned his back on Jesus and decided to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. On Wednesday we stayed in Bethany and on Thursday we returned to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On that night Jesus told us about the New Covenant and our need to celebrate this Covenant with bread and wine until He returned again. We didn't really understand until after what He meant. After supper, we made our way to the Garden of Gethsemane and things came crashing down for good.

I saw Him being arrested and I, along with the others, ran in fear and trembling. Please understand, Neither Judas' betrayal by a kiss on the Master's cheek, nor the violence of the temple guards was what overwhelmed us as much as the incredulous fear we felt. We had no idea it would be like this. And then the real trauma began. Jesus had a number of mock trials before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and they marched Him off to Pilate. I stood aside from the crowd that day and I heard them shouting, "**crucify Him, crucify Him.**" But I was silent! I had been willing to die with Him in Bethany, but this day I was petrified, and I could not utter a word in His defense. My mouth was dry with fear!

The next time I saw Jesus, was after He had been beaten and tortured by the Roman guards. His head was pierced with a crown of thorns, and He stood before us bloodied and beaten. The crowd and the guards still thirsted for more of His blood. And yet through it all, Jesus said nothing. I followed the crowd that day to Calvary Hill and I watched as He was crucified between two thieves. As darkness fell, I heard Him cry out to His Father to forgive those who crucified Him, but I couldn't forgive them. When he cried out: "**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,**" the rest of my heart shattered into tiny pieces. He was an innocent man! Look what they did to our dreams and hopes for the future. They killed Him, my heart broke, I couldn't go on. I was angry with Jesus that day, angry that He did not lift a finger to help Himself. It was as if He was a **Lamb** being led to the slaughter. I was angry with His Heavenly Father, who allowed His Son to be so cruelly killed. I was angry with Judas, Peter, John and with

every one of us who claimed to be His followers. But truthfully, I was furious with **myself**, in His greatest time of need, I too had abandoned Him.

This is where John tells the **third** story about me. The next day was the Sabbath, but I didn't go to the Temple, nor anywhere near the rest of the disciples. I didn't want to be hunted down by the Romans or the Temple guards, I wanted to hide in my despair. Late Sunday night, Peter found me, he appeared to have gone mad with grief and despair. He told me that he and the disciples had seen Jesus alive, and they had celebrated the very first Easter Sunday Service together. My response to Peter was pure rage: ***"No, not again! Go away with your madness and your foolish dreams and false hopes, for I have no hope left. I will not believe you. It's not that I don't want to believe you, but I just cannot believe you."*** Peter told me to believe as all ten of them had seen him, but I had not been there. Peter wanted me to instantly become **"an Easter Sunday person, but I was living in a Good Friday world."** Finally, to silence Peter, I told Him that I would only believe him if I myself **were to put my fingers in the holes in Jesus' hands and place my hand in the hole in His side.** Anything less was unacceptable. I had to touch and see the five wounds His body bore. That night Peter could not convince me that Jesus was alive, so he left me alone in my despair.

You may chastise me for my unbelief, but you were not there on Calvary Hill. You did not see Him die. You did not see His broken and bruised body taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. You did not see the stone rolled in front of the tomb or the soldiers guarding His tomb. And you could not see inside this shattered heart of mine.

A week later, which some people now call **Low Sunday**, I decided with great skepticism to join the disciples in the Upper Room. I certainly didn't go with expectation in my heart, but I went because, but I wanted to be free of the nonsense of Resurrection. Dead people don't rise and walk-through locked doors, but that is exactly what Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God did. I felt faint. The first thing He said was: **"Peace be with you."** How I needed peace and I was faint with fear as He stood facing me. He took me

at my word and invited me to place my fingers in his nail pierced hands and into His side. Jesus wasn't angry at me, but he seemed to grasp the level of my doubt, unbelief, fear, and despair. That night my legs could not support me, and I fell to my knees. I could not help but see the wounds in his feet, and I worshiped Jesus not as Rabbi, Teacher, King, or even as Messiah. Instead, all I could say was: "**MY LORD AND MY GOD.**" John said afterwards that I was the first person in history to call Jesus **God**. I could not help it. **He is God**. In a rush of understanding, it became very clear. Suddenly I knew the prophecies were fulfilled-the Messiah of God, the Saviour and Lord of the world stood in front of me. Crucified, Died, Buried, but Risen again on the third day. That my friends is the cornerstone of our faith! "**Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing.**"

Yes, I was there, and I saw Him alive. I saw His five wounds and I worshipped. That is my story, and it took place on the Sunday that is called **Low Sunday**. If they had been wise and chose to celebrate a day in the Church calendar for me, it should be the first Sunday after Easter Sunday -it should be **Low Sunday**.

How I wish I could stay with you here today as I have heard that this is a very loving Church, but I have received a call from the Spirit to go to India and preach the Gospel so I must go. As I leave this morning, I ask you not to be too hard on me or on others during their seasons of doubt. You see, practical people have a challenging time with the reality of the Resurrection. Physical Resurrection from the dead is beyond the realm of possibility, unless of course, **you are God**. Some people need evidence that they can hold on to. Please remember, I was not the only one who doubted Jesus' words. Every one of us followers doubted until Jesus appeared to us in a physical form. I spent three years following the One that I hoped would be our Messiah. In my grief and despair, I could not grasp how Jesus could accomplish His work by His willingness to suffer and die for my sins and the sins of the world. My understanding was limited. But also remember where was I when Jesus visited the Disciples the second time? Yes, I missed the very **first Easter Sunday Service**, but not the second. This time I wasn't off by myself, licking my emotional wounds. Instead, I was with the other Disciples. Yes, I was

reluctant, but I was there. It was at this **Second Easter Sunday Service**, where Jesus found me. And Jesus didn't disappoint. I can now say with others **"Christ had died, Christ is Risen, and Christ will come again!"**

As I leave you, to make my way to India, the Spirit has revealed I will lay down my life for the Gospel. If you are looking for evidence of the life of Christ and His resurrection – don't skip the last two lines in the writings of John that tell my story. Seek the evidence and you will find Him. John writes: **"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 20:30-31) That is exactly what Jesus wants for each of His Father's children – life, but not just life – abundant life. A life that matters. **An Easter Sunday life and therefore a Resurrected life.**

Now, I am really leaving. What a privilege to be with you today. One final thought, I want you to know that my **doubt** and **skepticism** has left you a tremendous blessing. I call it the **Thomas Blessing**. After Jesus had invited me to touch His hands and His side, He said to me: **"Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed."** You who gather here each week for worship have never seen the physical Risen Lord, but yet you believe. Blessed are you for that belief.

Now we can all respond together in faith when we hear these words:

**Alleluia - The Lord is Risen –  
He is Risen Indeed - Alleluia" Amen!**