



A Broken Heart

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So what is this man's trouble? His doubts echo through history. We often assume that he was just a tough guy who had trouble trusting, but it would help you and me in our own doubts if we could understand more about someone who couldn't believe the resurrection. We call him Doubting Thomas.

First, who was he? His real name in Aramaic, Te'oma (Thomas), meant twin, and he was also called Didymus, which meant the same thing in Greek. So he probably was a twin, perhaps of Matthew.

He might have been a bit glum. For instance, he gave a practical but gloomy response when Jesus' wanted to go back to Judea after Lazarus died. None of the disciples wanted to go back, because they knew the Jewish leaders had tried to stone Jesus there (John 10:24-30). Jesus gave some high-minded talk about how much they would learn by going, but Thomas ignored these reasons. His sarcastic reply is a perfect picture of him: "Alright, let us also go die with him" (John 11:16).

Here Thomas reminds me a bit of Joe Btfsplk, the famous Al Capp cartoon character who walked around with a perpetually dark rain cloud over his head!

Much later, just before the passion, Jesus said, "Where I am going you know the way." This was really a spiritual statement about going to the Father, but Thomas took it literally (John 14:3-6). He gives a very matter-of-fact response, but rooted in emotion. "You're keeping all this secret! We *can't* follow you if don't say where you are going! *Help us.*"

Thomas loved Jesus doggedly, that is for sure. But he feared the dangerous situations that Jesus always walked right into. Thomas'

practical nature looked frankly at them and drew the pragmatic, pessimistic conclusion. Thomas the twin had twin emotions, love and fear.

Is it any wonder, then, that in this Sunday's Gospel Thomas laid down his unflinching requirements for believing in the resurrection? Think of it. His worst misgivings had come true: Jesus was killed. To deal with this sorrow Thomas resolved to accept the death stolidly. He would never slip and talk about his departed friend in the present tense, as if he were still here. Thomas the pragmatist knew that Jesus was dead and gone, just as Thomas had predicted.

Then the apostles reversed the field.

“Didymus, Jesus is alive! You were gone, but suddenly he stood there among us even though all the doors were locked! He talked to us!”

No. NO! Thomas' heart could not accept it. He wanted it too much. He could not bear to believe it.

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nail marks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

This is exactly in character for Thomas/Didymus. These tough words are really a protection for a heart that would break in half if it were taken in by another false hope. “The only way I would believe such nonsense is if you give me absolute proof.”

Jesus gave it. Fingers in nail marks, hand into side.

Thomas had always belonged to Jesus. Yes he was cynical, but when he got the practical proof he needed, he sank to the ground in heart-moving surrender.

“My Lord and my God.”

What a great story for us.

And what a great story for all of us, as grieving parents. For many, the only way to describe the death of a child is “horrific.” We are brought to our knees. Like Thomas, all of our hopes and dreams have been shattered. Life, as we knew it, will never be the same. How true is this in so many ways?

Like Thomas, we want to protect ourselves from any additional hurt. So we doubt everything. Have you ever felt this way?

Thomas doubted the resurrection, not because he was cynical, but because he loved Jesus so much. He didn’t want to be hurt so deeply again. The greater the love, the greater the grief.

However, Thomas’ questioning did open his heart even further to Jesus’ love and mercy—and it did tremendously increase his faith. When he said, “*My Lord and My God,*” he was the very first apostle to address Jesus as “*God.*” So, does this make Thomas an even greater believer than the other apostles?

As grieving parents, we take tremendous comfort in knowing that questioning our faith is not a bad thing. Someday, like Thomas, that tiny pinprick of faith may turn into a burning bush and we will be filled with the courage, strength, and faith that we need to confront anything. “Blessed are those who have not seen, but still believe.”