



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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JOHN 20:24-29

Easter Sunday

Each generation has been given like a nickname. You know, there's the boomers and then there's the Generation X, and then there's the millennials. The current generation, the ones who are presently between the ages of 10-25 are called Generation Z. One of the neat things that I like about Generation Z is that they are genuine. Z is for like Zoomers. You know, they zoom into McDonald's, and they zoom in to get the diapers, and they zoom in to do whatever. They're always zooming around. But there's this genuineness about this generation that I'm really impressed with. This is my target audience. This is the people I try to preach to between ages of 10-25 every Sunday. They're so genuine, they want to be real. They are not interested in some of the fake stuff they've seen for years. They don't want to hear any more about politicians who claim things and then they don't come through with those. They don't want to see advertising that promises something and doesn't produce. And when it comes to faith, they want something that's genuine. They want something that's real. They don't want something that's fake.

I really appreciate that about them and just want to encourage them to find this. Because when they become Christians, they are the disciples. These are people who say, "I want to be real. I don't want to play church. I don't want to do something that's fake. I want to make it real in my life." The flip side of that is that there are some young people who say, "I'm not interested in organized religion, I'm not interested in church until I have some kind of experience. If God gives me some kind of an experience with Him, then I'll be satisfied. That's what I want in my life – an experience." Because see, they're genuine. They're real. But some of them are hesitant to come to faith because their desire for experience, they're just not finding what they want. And so they have a hard time with all of this.

I'd like to speak to those people and to, of course, all of us today. Because I want to take a man in the Bible who was I think like that. A Generation Z kind of a guy. His name was Thomas, and I want to take you into the story on Resurrection Sunday about Thomas.

The story takes place not at the beginning of the day. We know the beginning part. Jesus rose from the dead, He met with Mary, then He got on this long trek seven-mile journey down to Emmaus. But in the evening He appears to the disciples and that's where I'm going to pick up the story. In the evening where they are gathered together. We could call it a church service, although the church had not officially started yet. The church officially starts in Acts 2. Seven weeks, forty-nine days later, from where they are right now the church will officially start. But they're starting to gather already. And they're doing that on the first day of the week.

So let's look into the passage and see what we have in John 20:19 and following. *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

It's really interesting that the disciples were afraid. They had some issues. They had some challenges. I mean, these are the A-postles. These aren't the B-postles. I mean, these are the A-postles. These are the ones God has chosen to advance Christianity all over the place. And they are huddled inside of this room with the doors locked because they've got their issues. I just think it's really interesting that they have their issues. Because people who gather together in a church have issues. I mean, we have our challenges. We have our problems. And that's what's going on here. They have their issues. They're stuck within this confines and Jesus comes in and Jesus has a message for them in what we'll call the evening service. (I don't know we can call it that.) But we'll call it the evening service.

Jesus has a message for them. And notice what He says. He says to them, "Peace be with you." This is the kind of message I think we all need. This is the message that comes to us in Christianity continually that Jesus comes alongside of us and produces peace inside of our hearts. Peace to deal with our anxiety. Peace to deal with our guilt. Peace to deal with the worries and struggles of our lives. He gives us this peace. And so that's His message as He comes in and He's going to talk to the disciples. He says to them, "Peace be with you." *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad.* That's our word *joy*, by the way. If you've been following us in Philippians, that's the word *joy* right there. *They were glad when they saw the Lord.*

Just let me say that sometimes if you're going to see the Lord, you have to look past the imperfect people in His church, right? Sometimes there's imperfect people and we have to look past them to get to the real Jesus and see Him. Well that's what's happening here. *Jesus said to them again* (He's repeating the message), *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* He's saying, guys, you are the leaders. You are the ones, and I'm going to send you out into the world because there's a world that needs this peace that I am providing to you. There are people all over the world who need to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's going to bring peace into their marriage relationships that are suffering. It's going to bring peace into their family dynamics where they're having challenges. It's going to be peace that's going to help them in the struggles that they face, the immense challenges that they face in their lives. They need peace. You guys are the ones who are sending that out. I'm sending you out on a mission, just like God the Father has sent me on a mission and I've accomplished my mission here. You guys have a mission too and I'm sending you out. I mean this is like a sermon. He's preaching here. *I'm sending you.*

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." In other words, I'm helping you guys understand this idea of salvation. You can tell anybody this: If you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will be forgiven. And if you don't accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will not be forgiven. That's the message that He's sharing. What a dynamic sermon that He preaches in just a few verses there in

this passage. What an amazing evening that must have been as those guys went home and thought about it.

Well let's go on to the next verse in verse 24 because now we come to our guy, Thomas. *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin* (I suppose he had a twin, that's why he's called the Twin) *was not with them when Jesus came.* So he wasn't there at the service. I don't know why he wasn't there. Maybe he was running an errand, or maybe he's like some people today who say, "You know, I've had enough of this. I heard all this message when I was growing up as a Christian. I knew someone who was a Christian and they messed up. I just can't handle this. You know, I thought He was coming to be a King. And now He died. It just doesn't fit with what I thought was going to happen. And now His body's gone. And the Roman soldiers are saying that the disciples stole the body. And I don't know. I need a break from this." I think maybe that's what he's saying. I need a break from all of this. See, I think Thomas had a sliver of God. He understands a little bit about who He was, the King. But he didn't understand the big picture of who God was or is. Something that we all need in our lives. We got to get the big picture. We've got to understand what that big picture is. How are we going to get that? Well, we're going to learn in the passage here what happens.

So Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

It's from this statement that he gets the title Doubting Thomas. I think that's a little bit unfair. In fact, Generation Z would say we don't like that. Generation Z people says we don't like to label people based on one piece of information that we know about them. So we don't want to label someone because of the color of their skin. We don't want to label someone because of their ethnic background. We don't want to label someone because of their socio-economic class. We don't want to label someone because of the country they came from. We don't want to label people. That's what Generation Z would say. We don't want to characterize someone by one thing that happened. But that's what happening. That's why we call him Doubting Thomas. It doesn't say in the Bible he's Doubting Thomas. I don't like that term either. I would rather say he's Honest Thomas. He's genuine. He's one of these guys who says I want this to be real. I want to understand. I want to experience is what he's saying. I want to experience God, then I'll believe. He says, in fact if I don't experience them, I'm never going to believe. That's what he's saying to them.

Now I think Thomas has a little bit of a challenge here. Because what Thomas is doing is he's raising experience up to be the standard for truth for him. In other words he's saying if I don't experience something, it can't be true for me. This is a whole movement among young people today when they start saying, "Oh, well, I'll tell you what's true for me." As if true for me is different from what truth really is. When experience gets to be lifted up so high that it becomes truth, then we are in danger. We have a problem. And so Thomas is basically saying today what I think some young people are saying today. He's saying, I am not going to get involved in organized religion, I'm not going to get involved in the church, I'm not going to get involved in

anything that has to do with Christianity, unless I experience it first. If God wants to touch me, fine. Then I'll get involved in these things that are going on.

Here's the problem with experience being your authority. When experience is your authority, then you will never have enough experiences from the past to provide with certainty what's going to happen in the future. You never can. You never know what's going to happen tomorrow. You may experience God over and over and over again. But we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Experience is not a good measure. It's not a good authority to help me deal with what's going to happen in the future. It's just not. Thomas is making a mistake here. He's going to learn in the story. But let's just ask Thomas a question. How much experience do you need, Thomas, in order to come to Christ, in order to believe? How much experience do you need? Let me ask you, Thomas. If you actually saw Jesus raise somebody from the dead, would you come to Christ? I just ask you that. If you saw a real miracle, I mean a big one, I mean a huge one like raising someone from the dead, would you say, "Oh yes. I am now in. I will believe." Maybe you would.

Well I want to take you to another story in the Bible about Thomas. There's another time when he's mentioned. In fact, let's go to John 11. Let me tell you the story first. Because Lazarus had died. He was dead. And Jesus and the disciples are kind of arguing, really, about whether they should go up to Bethany, which is two miles from Jerusalem, because the Jews now are trying to kill Jesus. So they're arguing and having this discussion about whether they should go up or not. And so back and forth, back and forth, until Thomas speaks. He's the one who settles it for everybody. He says... Let's pick up the story in verse 16. *So Thomas, called the Twin* (same guy of course, unless it's his twin, I don't know) *said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."* I'm thinking, whoa, that's quite a statement. But he convinces everybody okay, we're going. So Thomas says, "Hey, let's follow Jesus. We're going to go even though we might die with Him."

Let's read on. Because we're going to find some other people that also have a sliver of God like Thomas did. When you have a sliver of God, that's dangerous if you start identifying God as that sliver. Just like we say Doubting Thomas and we define Thomas by this one experience, we're in danger. We do the same thing with God. We say, "I know God in this way. And if we only know Him in that way, we're missing out on how big God really is." And that's what we need. We need the bigness of God. And we aren't going to find it with our little sliver. But there's some other people in the story who have a sliver of God, and God wants to expand that so they can see the big God that we all want to see.

Listen to this story. This is so amazing. Verse 17. *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.* The point is, he was really dead. Okay? Not pretend to be dead, he was really dead. And he'd been buried for four days. He was gone. Okay.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So they're kind of setting the scene here. *So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus* (listen to this), *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* You know what she's saying? She's saying, Lord, I know you as a healer. The

sliver of God that I have of you, the experiences that I have had up to this point, tell me that if you would have been here, he wouldn't have died. She knows Him as Healer, but not how she needs to know Him. Not in the big picture of God. But she does know Him as Healer and says, "Look, he wouldn't have died." *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.* Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him... Because she only has a sliver of God, you see. She's making decisions based on her past experience. She went to Sunday School, it looks like. *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* I got that class. I was present in that class at Sunday School about the resurrection so I know all this about God, she's saying. She's saying I've got this sliver of God and I know who He is and I know kind of about Christianity, that there's going to be a resurrection the last day. That's what she's saying. And then notice, *Jesus said to her...* I want you to understand something bigger here. Not just a sliver of God. I want to give you the bigger picture of God. And Jesus says – "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" Do you see the word *believe* used three times there? The reason belief is so important is because that is going to be the catalyst that's going to take us from where we are to into the future of our lives.

We can never have enough experience to take us into the future and feel like we have the answers that we need. There's never enough experience you can have with God that you can use experience as your foundation for life. And so Jesus wants to enlighten them. He wants to transform them. He wants them to realize that there's something else you really need and that thing you need is belief.

Do you believe that I'm the resurrection? *She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."* That's a pretty important statement. When you come to that place where you say, yes, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God who is coming into the world.

When she had said this (now we're going to shift to another person in the story), *she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here."* I find that interesting. Here we got Mary's had the sliver. She knows Him as the Teacher. Oh she probably knows Him as the Healer too. "*The Teacher is here and is calling for you.*" *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.*

Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." I suspect that Mary and Martha had had a conversation about this and they had been ruminating about this. So they both come to Jesus with the same concern. If you had been here, he wouldn't have died. We know that you're the Healer. You healed the blind man in the two chapters before, in chapter 9, you heal other people. Yet, if you would have been here, he wouldn't be dead. They know Him as the Healer. That's how they know Him. The sliver of God that they have.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said (and here we go again – they have a sliver of God), "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

*Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Now you've got to imagine Martha in this picture here because Martha has no idea how big God is. She just has a sliver of God that limits her understanding of the power of God and what He wants to do. And so she says – "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." You see, she's thinking in this one kind of picture that she knows about life. And God wants to say, "I've got so much more to show you. I want you to see so much more about what I have to offer you. I want you to understand how big I am and how powerful I am in this world today." And so Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" Jesus' message is believe. That's what He's saying. That's going to be your catalyst that's going to move you from where you are and whatever experience you have to where you need to be that's the unknown that's out there. He says – *Didn't I tell you if you believe you would see the glory of God?**

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." Here Jesus is talking to the Father. I'm doing this. Lord, I'm talking to you, just so everybody can hear it, because I want them to know that you're bigger than they think you are. So that they can believe that you sent me."

And when he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice (this is Jesus yelling by the way), "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. This guy's a mummy, okay. He's coming out of the tomb looking like a mummy. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." All these people are around going, whoa, this is really wild, this is crazy, including Thomas. We know he's at the story here. He's watching this going, "Whoa, this is unbelievable. Jesus raised somebody from the dead. I can't believe this. This is so amazing."

How many experiences with God do you need in order to believe? See, the problem is you can never have enough experiences, if that's your foundation in life, in order to meet the future. Because every time you get to another place in life, you're going to go, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Can God handle this big problem?" Can God handle this problem of the loss of a spouse? Can God handle this problem? This problem of a cancer in my life? Can God handle this problem that's out here? What is it going to take for Thomas to be able to move past experience as the authority to something else? It's going to take a step of faith. That's what it takes. You cannot move from experience into the future without this step of faith. This is Jesus' whole message that He's trying to communicate.

So let's go back into our story back up there in the upper room. Because *eight days later*, says verse 26 of John 20. Eight days later. That means Sunday the following week they're having

another evening service. *His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.* He decided to come to church on this particular day. Isn't that interesting?

Although the doors were locked... Here we still got these poor people. They're locked inside of their own world because they're afraid of the Jews. They've got issues. Isn't that true in our lives today? People are locked into their own issues. They're stuck because of their own anxiety. They're stuck because they don't have what they wish they could have in life. They're stuck because things didn't turn out the way they thought they would. They're stuck because they look out in the world and they say there's war. They look out in the world and they say there's disease. They look out in the world and say they're suffering, and they say my sliver of God doesn't envelop all of those things. I've got a problem. I'm going to lock the doors. These are the A-postles, okay? These are not the B-postles. These are the A-postles. These are the guys who are going to change Christianity. They're going to extend Christianity to all over the world, and they're locked in their little rooms like people are today. It's just so fascinating.

Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Well that's the same message he preached last week, isn't it? I mean, Jesus has this message He wants to communicate. It reminds me of the pastor who goes to a new church, and he preaches this great sermon. And the people come up and say, "Pastor, that was a great sermon." The next week, he comes back, and he preaches the exact same sermon the second week. And the people come up and say, "Pastor, that was a really good sermon." The next week, he comes up and he preaches the exact same sermon again, and they come up and they say, "Pastor, that was a great sermon. But I think you already preached it before." And the pastor said, "Well when you get it, then I'll preach another sermon." I think that's what Jesus is saying here. Peace be with you guys. You're locked up in this place again. You are the guys who will bust out of here. You're the guys who aren't going to be afraid of anything. You're going to go past your fears, and you're going to realize you are on a mission in life. And that mission is to share the gospel message with people in need, this peace that you need in your life. So He's preaching the sermon again. He says to them, "*Peace be with you.*"

Are you ever in church, and you're sitting there in church and you're in the pastor's preaching, you say, "That message was just for me. I felt like God was speaking directly to me." That's what Thomas has happening here. *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. (Then He says these words.) Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* So He's saying, well, okay, Thomas, I've given you another experience. An experience for your life and you say, "Yes, you are God right now." But I want you to know, Thomas, there are going to be times in your life, when you're going to go out there and not going to be able to see. You're going to believe and then see.

It's really amazing what happens when you put your faith in Jesus Christ because you believe and then you see all of these things happen. Do you know what happened to Thomas after this? We don't have any record in the Bible of what happened to him. But he was one of the disciples that went out and shared the message of the gospel with others. And tradition and history tell us that Thomas made his way all the way to the country of India. Do you know how far it is to get

to India from Israel? Here's Thomas moving himself all the way to Israel and the Christian church today follows its roots back to Thomas the disciple who came to India to start the church in India.

Can you imagine Thomas? Okay. He's had all these experiences with God. But he comes out there. And now we come out to India and they've got snakes there. I'm telling you, they are real snakes out there in India. He's got all kinds of things – false religions. He's got challenges to face. Is God able to help me in the future of my life? Well, He never helped me in the same way before. And if we're relying on experience continually in our lives, we are stuck. Because there's always going to be something out front of us and we don't know what we're going to do. We don't know what's going to happen. But there's one piece that brings this whole thing together. And Jesus wants to say this to Thomas. Thomas, you just got to understand this. Blessed are the people who believe because then they're going to see. It's this belief that we have that opens the door to see all of God, not just a sliver of God. But to see all of God and be able to enjoy Him, and to be able to see Him and to be able to trust Him as we go into the next phase of our life, whatever that is. As you go into the next phase, you don't have to have had past experiences, to provide certainty of what God is going to do because you have faith in Christ. It's the faith that we have.

So that's why it's so important for a person who's in Generation Z (or really any of us) to recognize that it's the faith that we have in Jesus Christ that allows us to experience the next day of our lives. Anything that happens we can do that because we believe in Jesus Christ. We trust Him. He's guiding us through. Wow. That is the message.

Let me just summarize this with three different points that I think are important. One: Don't miss church. Even though the people are imperfect, it's the place where you see the miracles of God. Suggestion number two: Don't rely on experience. There will never be enough experiences to provide you with all you need to face new life experiences. And suggestion number three: Choose to believe. Faith opens the door to see more of God than you could ever imagine. Your life with God flourishes when you believe.

You know, maybe you're here today and you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The experience you have only gives you a sliver of God. I've just going to tell you, God wants to give you a lot more. He wants to take who He is into your life so you can experience so much more in your life. And the ticket for that is your personal faith in Jesus Christ. You can't rely on someone else's faith. It's your own personal faith with Jesus Christ.

That is the message that Jesus is trying to get to Thomas and the message that we of course need in our own lives. It's this message that says God is so big that I can't fully understand it. It's a message that says I am so small that I am in trouble. That I have sin in my life and that sin in my life has created a gap for me that I just can't know God. And when I come to that place where I realize I am not as self-sufficient as I think I am, then I come to that very important place in my life where I say, "I'm going to question my doubt. I'm going to allow my doubt to go to the side for a little bit."

There's two kinds of doubt, you know. There's a kind of doubt that says doubt is pushing me away. And then there's the other kind of doubt that says I'm attracted. Scientists use doubt all the time. I doubt if this is true, so I'm going to check it out. You see, there's a good kind of doubt that draws us forward.

As I was thinking about doubt this week, I was thinking about Debra, whose anniversary must be somewhere around today. How many years thirteen years? What? Three? Three? No, no, no. You've been a Christian for longer than three years. Yes. Because here's what she said. "For Lent I'm going to give up doubt." That's what she said. "I'm going to give up doubt for Lent." She shared this testimony with us in the middle school. I'm going to give up doubt for Lent. I thought, well, that's remarkable. Just think if you were to do that, not for Lent. Just give up doubt. Because when you give up doubt, you open up the door to believe. And when you believe you see the immense things that God has to offer us in our lives.

I want to offer that to you today. If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can do it this morning. This is the time where you can say, "I want to take that step past experience to belief as my foundation for moving forward." As you do that, God will do something very special in your life.

So would you bow your heads with me? And if you're at that place where you want to pray, to accept Jesus Christ in your life, would you just in your heart pray these words before the Lord.

[PRAYER] Lord, I know that I am a sinner, that I have a need for a Savior. I want to take that step to believe in you and to trust you in my life.

Lord, each of us come before you because we have our own doubts. We have our own challenges. And, Lord, we need the bigger picture of you and who you are. We ask you to speak to us, teach us, lead us, guide us, and give us the grace, really, to take that step of faith that we need to believe even before we experience it. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.