



2nd Sunday of Easter – April 11-12-13, 2026

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Easter Gives Us a Second Chance**

1. To learn from doubt
2. To live the Christian faith

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "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." 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 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: 24-31).

Dear friends, still enjoying the Easter victory of Christ,

Americans are fascinated with second chances. After all, who doesn't want a second shot at glory? We like second chance sweepstakes, the chance to turn a losing ticket into a winner. We like medical inventions like pacemakers that give us or someone we love a second chance at life. Sometimes God gives us second chances like this. Sometimes not. Really the word "chance" is a misnomer. Since God controls everything, there's no such thing as "chance" or "luck." It's all according to God's loving plan for us. But, I think we can correctly understand second chances as "new opportunities" to live as Christians.

The key is what we do with these new opportunities or second chances. Think of President Abraham Lincoln. Maybe you knew he ran for political office seven times and was defeated each time. He even went bankrupt in his business, but didn't give into his doubts and quit. Or think of legendary basketball player Michael Jordan, the GOAT. Did you know Michael was cut by his high school basketball coach because he didn't have good enough skills to play on the team? Michael didn't give into his doubts either, but went on to sports greatness.

If second chances are important in politics and sports, then we should apply that to our lives as Christians. God has been giving second chances of Grace to people since the creation began. When Adam & Eve defied God, ruined His perfect creation, passing down sin and death to every human being, God didn't treat them as they deserved. He

gave them a second chance by promising to send a Savior to pay their debt of sin freely and fully. When the prophet Jonah ran from God because he didn't think God was fair in giving a second chance to the citizens of Ninevah to repent, God didn't strike him dead on that boat to Tarshish. Instead, God gave Jonah a second chance, and caused the winds to blow, finally bringing Jonah around. And in today's sermon text, God gave Thomas a second chance.

I like Thomas, not just because that happens to be my middle name or because Thomas was called "Didymus," which means he was "a twin." I like Thomas because, when given a second chance, Thomas put aside His doubts with the Holy Spirit and confessed Jesus as: ***My LORD and my God.*** We will be blessed if we respond the same way. History remembers him as "doubting Thomas." But, that's not quite right. Yes, doubt was His way of responding this time. But, doubt was not His way of life.

Before we feel too pious to place Thomas in the hall of shame, let's take a look at our own lives. Do doubts ever fill our minds? Maybe they're small ones like: why did God allow bad weather when I had big plans? Maybe they're large doubts like: "why did God allow my family member to be taken in death? God, do you know what you're doing? When these or other doubts enter our minds, and they will, remember the Easter victory of Jesus. Remember that His victory over sin, death, and the devil becomes our victory by a simple child-like faith. So as we study the words of John, chapter 20, remember **Easter Gives Us a Second Chance**. Easter gives us a second chance to learn from doubt and live our Christian faith.

Our sermon reading begins: ***v24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. v25a So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the LORD."*** It was Easter evening. The disciples were behind locked doors, afraid for their lives. If the Romans wouldn't get them, the Jewish leaders probably would. Those doors may have kept these enemies out, their fears & doubts were locked in. Suddenly Jesus appeared to them and proved His Easter victory as the risen Son of God and Savior of the world. "He's alive!" they said. This appearance gave them the confidence they needed, a confidence that would help them and future generations. There Jesus was, in the flesh, alive. But, someone was missing from this group. It was Thomas. Thomas missed out on this appearance. But, God gave Thomas a second chance.

So how did Thomas respond to the resurrection? He said: ***v25b "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 it."*** You could say that Thomas was from the state of Missouri, the "show-me-state." This news was too good to be true. Thomas was really saying: "Don't break my heart again. I saw Jesus on the cross and in the grave. I just can't take it again." I'm not excusing his behavior, just explaining it. Thomas was being human, rational. Ask anyone. When people die, they don't come back to life. Thomas knew that the Roman soldiers put holes in His hands, feet, and side. So he did the one thing, any of us would do. He doubted. Thomas wanted proof, proof He could see with

his own eyes. He wanted proof on His own terms. And that's was the problem. Thomas was showing His human weakness and sin and almost missed out on the Easter miracle.

Do we ever have doubts? Do we ever doubt God's love? On our currency, it still reads: "In God we trust." But, how often do we really do that ... trust God ... take Him at His Word with a child-like faith?

Doubt is a rather human response. As Christians this side of eternity, we'll always have an imperfect faith, that has a doubt or two. Having a doubt isn't sin. But, remaining in doubt can quickly become sin when we demand proof on our terms like Thomas.

Satan can use doubt as a weapon to hurt us. In the Garden of Eden, he asked Eve: *Did God really say you must not eat fruit from the forbidden tree?* He tried to fool her with doubt. Instead of comparing Satan's words with what God said, she let this doubt lead to rejection and disobedience. How often haven't we done that?

But, Easter Gives us a second chance. When we take our doubts and sins to the cross, we find the peace that only Jesus gives. We find peace with God knowing our sins have been paid in full by the blood of Jesus. And when we hold onto the promises of God, we don't need to rely on our imperfect reason or senses. Like the bumper sticker says: "God said it. That settles it. I believe it. In His Word, God never asks to understand Him, or His way of dealing with us. How could we? He even says: *My thoughts are not your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8)*. He just asks us to believe Him. Believe that if He's solved our greatest problem of sin, He will solve our every problem.

Martin Luther once said: "I can't prevent the birds from flying overhead. But, I can prevent them from making a nest in my hair." This illustration can apply to doubt. No, we won't be able to lock out every doubt. But, we can keep those doubts from destroying our faith by returning to the Word and living the Christian faith. Listen to how Jesus helped Thomas.

A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Put your fingers here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." How would you feel if you were Thomas? About this big? Even though Thomas doubted, Jesus gave Him a second chance. And how did Thomas respond THIS time? He confessed: ***My LORD and my God.*** Thomas lived His Easter faith by this beautiful confession of faith.

And Thomas didn't stop there. History records Thomas one who followed Jesus after Easter, spreading the news of Easter in his backyard and all the way to India. He even died for being a follower of Jesus. Thomas doubted in our Bible reading. But, he didn't let that doubt stop him from living the Christian faith.

Easter still changes us. There are times we wish that we could see Jesus, touch Him and hear His words of comfort. But, Jesus has got a better plan. He tells us that He's always with us, to the end of the age. He's present with us in Word and Sacrament. And that makes a difference and causes us to live our Easter faith. Love for Jesus drove Thomas and countless other Christians across the world. Will it drive us down the street to tell our friends and neighbors about Jesus and invite them to join us here at St. Paul's?

Yes, **Easter Gives Us a Second Chance**. But, God has never promised us more time. He says in Hebrews 4:7 ***Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*** In other words, God tells us to learn about Jesus today, to confess His name today, serve and witness for Him today. He's never promised us a tomorrow. Now is the time. Let Easter change you today. Amen.