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**Title:** Left Out

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**Scripture:** [John 20:19-23](#)

**Text:** [John 20:24-31](#)

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Easter is over, or so many think. Go to the store and you will find no Easter cards on the racks. If you are a bargain hunter, you can find Easter candy for half price. I don't know how long jelly beans or Cadbury eggs last but I have to believe that Peeps have a shelf life of at least a couple of hundred years. They will be just as fresh or

stale, depending on your perspective, next year as they are right now. You can grab a bargain.

Easter isn't over even if most of us think it is. The season of Easter continues because Jesus doesn't rise from the grave and then vanish. The Risen Christ sticks around for fifty days, making guest appearances and teaching. Paul says "... that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (1 Corinthians 15:5-8) That appearance doesn't count during this season of Easter because it took place after Jesus ascended to heaven. Paul would like it to count and for him, it was just as real as all of the other appearances. But when it comes to seeing Jesus, either the earthly Jesus or the resurrected Savior, Paul was left out.

Thomas was left out too. That's today's story and churches all around the world are looking at it, like it was as new and fresh, even though it's had a long shelf-life. It is almost always looked at on "low Sunday." That's what preachers call this weekend. It is always one of the lowest attended Sundays of the year after the high of Easter. But it also has to do with energy. Everyone is up for Easter, preachers included. But we are a little tired; our energy is low and you can often feel it in worship. It is a little like when they used to have the Pro Bowl after the Super Bowl. It just didn't have the same feel as the big game.

On this low Sunday, we remember Thomas being left out. Or at least he thinks he was left out. He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the 10 on Easter evening. By the way, Paul doesn't say anything about that appearance. Why was that left out? For that matter, he doesn't mention the appearance to Mary Magdalene. Why leave that out? But, this isn't about Paul or Mary. It is about Thomas and he feels left out because he was late to the party. Nobody really knows where he was. Scripture just says, "But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came." (John 20:24) Where was he? Maybe he was out getting dinner for everybody. DoorDash and GrubHub didn't exist in the first century. Maybe Thomas is out getting pizza but it wouldn't have been Little Caesar's pizza, even though it sounds like it should be. Lamb kebab is more likely.

Maybe it wasn't food. Maybe he just needed to work through the grief and he needed to be alone. He might have been walking around the Temple mount, remembering the events, trying to sort through all that happened. If they were hiding out in the upper room for fear of the Jews, as John says, they were hiding in plain sight. The historic upper room is no more than three or four blocks from the western wall of the temple, what we call the Wailing Wall. Maybe that is where Thomas was, wailing and praying about the death of Jesus.

If he was, it was a courageous thing to do. But that's Thomas nickname, isn't it? Courageous Thomas. Oh, you thought his nickname was Doubting Thomas? I don't think that is what the disciples would have called him.

We think they called him Didymus which means twin. There is some manuscript indication that's all. Not Thomas, just Didymus. Doubting Didymus has a ring, doesn't it? But I don't think they would have called him doubting. I think they might have nicknamed him courageous. When the disciples and Jesus find out that Lazarus has died and Jesus intends to go back to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, they don't want to go. They had just left Jerusalem fearing for Jesus life. "Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'" (John 11:16) That sounds courageous to me and if he was out wandering around on Easter evening, he was, compared to the other disciples, a lot more courageous.

Courageous Thomas is a good nickname but it could have been Inquiring Thomas because inquiring minds want to know. That was Thomas. Centuries before the National Enquiry used it as a slogan, inquiring Thomas asked and in a way, set up Jesus' return appearance in the Upper Room. On Thursday night, after Jesus had his Last Supper, he prepared them for what was

coming. He told them "I'm leaving but don't be troubled and don't be afraid. I'm off to prepare a place for you." Then Jesus says "And you know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:4)

Like little children concerned that their mother is leaving them for a half hour to go to the grocery store, they are confused. Thomas admits it and speaks up, inquiries on behalf of all of them "Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5) Jesus tells them." Haven't you been listening? I'm the way, the truth, and the life. But don't worry, you are going to be okay. I won't leave you alone. We will get you another guide." "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever, this is the Spirit of Truth." (John 14:16-17a.) Then, to make sure that they understand this, Jesus says again, "You are going to feel good about this because "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14: 27) Inquiring Thomas set this up like he is lobbing up a softball for Jesus to knock out of the park.

Which may be one of the biggest reasons that Thomas feels left out. He set Jesus up to return to the Upper Room and when he does, Thomas isn't there. He's is off doing whatever and then, Jesus appears and does the very two things he promised to do when inquiring Thomas asks, "Where are you going?" He gives them peace and breathes the Holy Spirit. Thomas is missing all of this and when he returns, he feels left out.

That's what he says. When Thomas, shows up and the 10 disciples say, "You just missed Jesus" giving us peace and filling us with the Holy Spirit, Thomas does not say, "You guys are crazy. Surely you don't believe that. Neither did he say, "I'll never believe such nonsense. Rather, he says, "I feel left out so unless I have firsthand experience, unless I see for myself. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."" (John 20:25)

I've never understood why Thomas is labeled doubting when he was only asking for the same experience that the ten experienced. He didn't see what they saw and he feels left out. And Thomas is too inquisitive to borrow someone else's faith experience. So he is courageous enough to see, "Unless I see...." He isn't doubting Thomas. He's left out Thomas.

A week after Easter, Jesus appears again in that same locked room as before and this time Thomas is there. Jesus offers Thomas his body: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." (John 20:27) Here's the thing. We assume that Thomas touches Jesus' wounds. Artists throughout the ages have depicted it

that way.<sup>1</sup> With all due respect to their creativity and our own imaginations, Thomas doesn't touch Jesus. John says he just professes his faith saying, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas didn't need the proof he thought he needed to believe. He doesn't need hard, tangible evidence for himself. He doesn't have to have all his doubts and questions resolved. He has been given all of the experiences that he needs with Jesus enough to believe. And it is by believing that we see.

We like to say "seeing is believing" but when it comes to faith, it is just the other way around. That's what Jesus wants Thomas to understand. Believing is seeing, something Anselm of Canterbury first observed. *Credo ut intelligam*. Our conviction that Jesus is a risen, living Lord doesn't start there, but in faith which is why Jesus adds a blessing and a beatitude over Thomas. "Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'" (John 20:29) In other words, if you have to have evidence, fine, but you really have enough already. I've given you enough. "Proof is not the currency of the kingdom of God. Rather, believing becomes the lens through which we see."<sup>2</sup>

C.S. Lewis once famously remarked, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Thomas was giving enough to see. So are we so that by believing we may see.

It's why some things are left out. Do you know what? I'll be honest. It aggravates me a little. I don't like anything to be left out but John says he did. He says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." (John 20:30) What was left out? What's up with that? Did John have a word count? Did he have a vicious editor who spilled red ink all over the first draft? What's left out?

John says, "It doesn't matter. You have enough." "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). There is enough written for us to believe and because he has given us all we need to trust. He's given us everything we need to say "My Lord and my God."

And the surprising thing is---it is enough. Take it from someone who never thought he'd be standing in a pulpit on a weekly basis: it's enough to change your life forever. We think we need proof. But being a Christian isn't about being convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt. It's not being able to prove

that Jesus fed 5,000 hungry people. It's not about being able to explain how God created or how Jesus defeated death. If being a Christian is about knowledge or facts or certainty, then John should give us every detail he has and nothing would have been left out.

But if it's about loving God, if it's about trusting that God in Christ offers himself for us, offers us a way of life to follow, then John's told us everything we need because it's not that 'seeing is believing,' it's that believing will give you a whole new way of seeing.<sup>3</sup>

Don't be left out. "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you will have life in his name." (John 20:31) Believe me. You'll see!

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<sup>1</sup> Micheli, Jason. Easter Encounters: Doubting Thomas. April 2, 2013. Retrieved @ Tamed Cynic

<sup>2</sup> Eyewitness Testimony. April 28, 2019. Retrieved by subscription at homelitics.com

<sup>3</sup> Micheli, Jason.