Risen Lord, we praise You for the incomparable love You have shown the world in Your suffering, death, and resurrection. Be present now as we seek to know You and to make You known. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

On this beautiful spring morning, we rejoice in the Resurrection of our Savior! Joy shimmers in the air as we lift up the Easter shout: "Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!" That acclamation is the lifeblood of Christian faith. It pulses through our Scriptures, our theology, and our music; it lights up our Eucharistic worship around this Table: Christ is alive!

Now, admittedly, we have not seen him. Not in the flesh, as Mary Magdalene did. We have not seen him as most of the disciples did on Easter evening, or as more than 500 other witnesses did, according to Paul in First Corinthians. [1 Cor 15:6] No—we have not seen him ourselves.

But untold numbers of believers have heard his voice, have glimpsed Christ in contemplation, have felt his power at the Communion table or sensed his enfolding love in a time of need. Over the centuries, Christian mystics have had astonishing visions of Christ enthroned in splendor or radiant with boundless compassion. The fourteenth-century mystic Catherine of Siena [1347–1380] saw that through his incarnation, Christ has become a living bridge stretching from heaven to earth, a

bridge leading sinners back to grace, protecting them on the journey by stone walls of virtue cemented by mortar mixed with Christ's blood, with a locked gate just before heaven: Christ the bridge is also the gate to eternal life, and that gate is opened by the key of his blood.[1] In the sixteenth century, Teresa of Ávila 1515–1582 saw the human soul as a shining castle made entirely of diamond, within whose walls Christ dwells as King, shining the dazzling light of divine grace outward.[2] Catherine, Teresa, and other mystical theologians have taught Christian communities to look beyond the material world, to look deeper. They have seen, they believed, and their testimony has transformed the lives of countless believers.

But there is another voice at the edge of our tradition, whispering something different. Can you hear it? "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." Ah—Thomas. "Doubting Thomas," as he is often known.

In the history of Christianity, it has been common to take Thomas as a problem, the model of a person who needs to be converted from a supposedly "weak" skepticism to true faith. All too often, Thomas and those like him have been seen as "projects" for evangelism—in need of persuasion that belief in the risen Christ is not just self-serving delusion. Moments ago, we sang, "We walk by faith and not by sight," that gorgeous hymn with lyrics by Henry Alford, a nineteenth-century theologian who served as Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, the mother church of our Episcopal tradition.[3] Drawing on Scripture, Mark 9:24 this cherished Victorian hymn teaches us

to pray, “We walk by faith…. Help, then, our unbelief!” The point is, help all the skeptical Thomases of the world to give up their objections and come around to orthodox belief.

Skeptic balks at the impossibility of the resurrection, then believes.

Problem solved!

But hang on. Let’s think a little more deeply about this.

Thomas is not some kind of cardboard character who doesn’t believe in Jesus,

doesn’t understand the magnitude of what has happened.

One commentator calls Thomas “obtuse” and excoriates him for his “faithless insistence on proof.”[4] But that interpretation is misguided.

Thomas is far more important to the Gospel of John than that.

He is, in fact, a model of dedication to his Lord. You’ll remember our Gospel lesson from three weeks ago: when Jesus was going to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead, the other disciples were terrified, because the religious authorities were seeking to stone Jesus. Thomas is the one who said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” John 11:16 Such love for Jesus! Such courage!

Later, the disciples had watched their Teacher die a torturous death on the cross, a public spectacle of unthinkable brutality. Thomas had seen the terrible sacrifice Jesus made—and whatever the other disciples might say, he’s going to stay true to what he had seen.

When the other disciples report that they've seen the risen Lord, Thomas refuses to accept their assurances.

Theological platitudes and speculation would not suffice.

Not when Jesus suffered what he'd suffered.

Jesus's lifeless body had been taken down from the cross, and nothing had changed. The vulnerable still struggled in conditions of deprivation and despair. The world still trembled under the savage domination of the Roman empire.

To accept some pious tale that erased the trauma of what Jesus endured?

Absolutely not. Thomas will not be satisfied with platitudes or wishful thinking.

He needs Jesus!

Thomas is faithful to Jesus, who suffered, died, and was buried.

That's the Jesus he had loved, the Jesus for whom he had been ready to die.

Shattered by grief, grounded in fidelity to his Lord, Thomas says NO.

"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."

A week later, it happens. Jesus appears and shows Thomas his wounds:

"See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt but believe."

We don't see what Thomas does next. The Gospel writer veils in mystery the moment when Thomas touches the imprints of the nails, the cosmos-transforming moment when Thomas reaches toward the gaping spear wound in Jesus's side.

We don't see it. But Thomas gives us a new Easter shout:

"My Lord and my God!"

Testimony from a disciple who dared to insist on the material reality of his wounded and risen Savior! Christ was alive—not a ghost, not some kind of hallucination born of post-traumatic grief, but in fact the Living God in their presence!

Thomas is the first in this or any Gospel to name Jesus as God. Yes, Jesus had taught, "Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise," John 5:19 and Jesus had said, "The Father and I are one." 10:30 But this is the first time a follower of Jesus has understood.[5]

The Gospel of John opens with a magnificent cosmic poem, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." 1:1 "All things came into being through him"—through Christ, the Word of God—and "what has come into being in him was life." 1:3–4 Then this extraordinary Gospel guides us through Jesus's profound teachings and seven miraculous signs pointing to him as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all who turn to him.

Just like the disciples in the Gospel of John, we've thought we understood—we've heard what God is doing in Christ—but we have not seen the divine Mystery unfolding right in front of us. The Gospel of John knows this. Written about 90

A.D., generations after Christ had ascended to heaven, the Fourth Gospel knows that the only ones left to follow Jesus are those "who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

So the Fourth Gospel gives us the gift of Thomas, who was ready to die with Jesus—Thomas, who witnessed what Jesus endured and dares to remain faithful to that Jesus: "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."

Because of Thomas, we can dare to say, "We are not satisfied with pious stories and spiritual platitudes. We will not believe based on lovely Victorian hymns or eloquent Prayer Book collects. We need Jesus!"

Joy shimmers in the air as angels sing, "In the beginning was the Word," to our wounded and radiant Savior, the One who loved us before the world began and loves us still, the One who promises, "I am Resurrection and I am Life!"[6]

We have not seen him. Not in the flesh.
But our spiritual ancestor, a courageous man named Thomas,
touched the wounds of the Living God.
Because of Thomas, we can dare to doubt.
Because of Thomas, we can reach toward the wounded One who has loved us since the dawn of time—and we might even dare to believe. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn J. Sharp

12 April 2026

Easter 2A

Habakkuk 2:1–4; Psalm 126; Hebrews 10:35–11:1; John 20:24–29

Preached at St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut

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[1] Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Paulist Press, 1980), esp. section "The Bridge," 64–71. Of Christ the Bridge leading believers to salvation, Catherine hears Christ explaining, "The eye cannot see, nor the tongue tell, nor can the heart imagine how many paths and methods I have, solely for love and to lead them back to grace so that my truth may be realized in them!" (31).

[2] Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Paulist Press, 1979), 1.1.1 (35). In her Epilogue, having described seven dwelling places in the castle, Teresa explains her spiritual vision still further: "In each of these [seven dwelling places] there are many others, below and above and to the sides, with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths, such delightful things that you would want to be dissolved in praises of the great God who created the soul in His own image and likeness" (196).

[3] "We walk by faith, and not by sight," #209 in *The Hymnal 1982* (Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), with words by Henry Alford (1810–1871) to the tune *St. Botolph* by Gordon Slater (1896–1979).

[4] Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding: A Reading of John's Gospel* (Liturgical Press, 2014), 337, 338.

[5] Marianne Meye Thompson observes that Thomas's "acclamation of the risen one as 'my Lord and my God!' acknowledges the inclusion of Jesus, the Word made flesh, in the identity of that one called 'the only true God' (1:1, 14), thus marking the other end of the confessional arc begun in the Gospel's opening verses" (*John*, New Testament Library [Westminster John Knox, 2015], 425).

[6] The stirring anarthrous syntax is drawn from the Episcopal service of Burial of the Dead: Rite Two in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 491.