

The Other Twin©**John 20:19-31; 1 Peter 1:3-9****April 30, 2017****Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**

What do you do when you're at the bottom of the pit? When you've just experienced something traumatic, devastating ... when you're in shock or deep grief?

Do you cling to others, searching for comfort in the company of friends and family? Do you just stay together and talk or cry?

Or are you like those who want to be alone? Do you find you just have to get out and away from others, maybe try to get your mind wrapped around what happened, try to figure out how to make sense of something so terrible.

It doesn't really matter where Thomas was when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples after he had risen from the dead, but I always find myself asking questions, whether they matter or not. It brings me a little closer to the scene.

If I had been one of the disciples who witnessed the horrific events that led up to Jesus' crucifixion and then watched him die and then had been hiding with the others in fear of being found and killed myself, I wonder at what point I would break down and just get away.

I think I would have to escape all the tears and lament and fear and just get myself out and away to do my own thinking and praying.

Of course, Thomas might have just taken an order for the local fast food joint and gone out to get burgers and fries for everyone.

Whatever the reason, when Jesus first showed himself in the room where the disciples were holed up, Thomas was not there. He missed the excitement – the miraculous appearance of the Lord who had been dead and is now alive.

I'd be thinking "Seriously? I leave for fifteen minutes and everything happens when I'm gone." And Thomas just could not believe what they were telling him.

What would you do? If you had been Thomas, would you have just taken their word for it? Believed that a dead man was now alive? Or would you be skeptical, thinking maybe they had seen a mirage – maybe it was wishful thinking?

In Bible study, we talked about how we do believe and we have never actually, physically seen Jesus. At least most of us haven't. But, think about it ... this was just right after Jesus had been killed.

They were traumatized. They didn't have 500 witnesses saying they had seen the risen Lord. They didn't have generations of believers teaching the resurrection story from the time they were babies.

Instead, they were eyewitnesses to his beatings and his crucifixion and his burial. They were the ones who had spent day and night with Jesus for the past three years.

I love how John emphasizes what Jesus says both times when he appears. Jesus says “Peace be with you. Peace be with you.” This is a peace that they desperately need, right? They are anxious and afraid and Jesus – the one who calmed the winds and the waves by saying “Peace be still” is now calming the storms in their souls by breathing peace into them.

And if they could not have that peace, they certainly would not be able to do what comes next. Jesus says “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

There is no way those fearful disciples would be able to go out and do ministry and continue Jesus’ mission in the world without that peace.

But he also gives them something else that is absolutely imperative for them to have the power they need to accomplish what he is asking. Jesus breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. This is the source of power they have to have.

When I was staying with my grandchildren at my daughter, Annie’s house recently, so she could go to California with my son-in-law, it was imperative that I had Internet there as I planned on doing all my work during the day while the children were in school. They live in the country and I have no cell phone reception there at all. I needed to be able to make phone calls and have the Internet for communicating with others for work and to be able to use my online study tools for writing my Easter sermon.

So the night I arrived was on Thursday. That evening I connected fine to their Internet. “Okay, I’m good to go,” I thought. But later that night the Internet went out and stayed out all night long. The next morning Annie and Eric left early. Still no Internet. So I tried doing what our cable company always tells me to do. I unplugged everything.

I pulled the router out from where it was wedged between the wall of the entertainment center and the television. I carefully looked to see just where each cord was plugged in in the back and then unplugged them. I waited a few minutes and plugged it all back in. But now, there was nothing. Even the light showing there was power was dead.

I searched and traced all the lines down through the hole in the back on down underneath to see if something had come loose but I couldn’t find anything.

That evening we came to Holly so I could get ready for Palm Sunday. Then we returned on Sunday afternoon to find it all still dead as a doorknob. So Annie got me the number to call for a technician to walk me through trying things. Even he was having a difficult time figuring it out.

Finally, he told me to try again just unplugging everything. I unhooked the top cables and then was in the process of unhooking the bottom one, thinking that was the power cord. I said, “this one is a little tight to unscrew but I’ll get it in a minute.”

He said, “Wait a minute. You shouldn’t have anything to unscrew on the power cord. It just plugs in.”

Well, yes. There was another place underneath that cord where a three-pronged plug should go. So, I started looking back again at all the wires and cords and sure enough, there it was, the power cord that must have slipped out as I pulled out the box and I never saw that one as one to unplug.

Guess what happened? As soon as I plugged that in – voila! We had power again. And it all started working and I had Internet and everything was wonderful.

You’ve got to be plugged in to the source of power to be able to do anything. Jesus plugged the disciples in to their source of power – the Holy Spirit. Without that power they would be as powerless as an unplugged router.

But getting back to Thomas ... Jesus did not just say, “too bad, you snooze, you lose.” No, he came back again and showed Thomas what he needed to believe. And he did believe. He proclaimed that profound statement – “My Lord and my God!”

To me, that is profound because it recognizes something we profess about the incarnation – that in Jesus, God is with us. That Jesus as Lord, is God in the flesh.

The Greek name for Thomas, is *Ditimus*, which means *Twin*. Supposedly, Thomas is a twin; has a twin; although there is nothing in the scriptures anywhere that names his twin.

So, why would John bother to mention that he is called The Twin? Surely, if it is in the Bible, there must be some meaning to it. Maybe not. Maybe it was just a little extra recognition of which Thomas he is talking about – something those early readers might understand.

But, consider this: what if we recognize ourselves in this story? What if we – what if you – and I – are Thomas’s twin?

“Never!” You might emphatically say. “I would never doubt my faith; never question whether or not Jesus truly is the Son of God. I would never ever consider the possibility that it was all made up, that the cross meant nothing more than death, that the empty tomb was a fabrication of the women’s imagination, or that it was empty but there are many explanations that are more credible than resurrection.”

Okay, then. I know there are some who come to believe so easily. Some people just seem to have it planted in them and there is no doubt. But, if you’ve ever even had the

slightest inkling of a question – like – is my loved one really alive? Really in heaven? Is there actually a heaven? Is there really a God?

And if so, is He loving, forgiving (because God knows I need forgiveness daily), does He understand my fears, my doubts, my feelings? Or, is this God a God who is full of judgment and wrath? If that is who God is, then I'm doomed.

Is there a devil? A hell? Are there really angels? Will we have bodies in heaven? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Will God resurrect us? What really happens when we die?

Is the Holy Spirit really with us? Guiding us? Is all this real? How can I know for sure? If you've ever asked even one of those questions then I would suggest you – and I – just might be the other twin. At bible study, we talked about how Thomas has sometimes gotten a bad rap for doubting. In fact, he has been dubbed "doubting Thomas," as if that were a very negative thing.

But doubts can be a way of wrestling and searching for the truth – and it can be a way of deepening our faith as we uncover new things in the Scriptures and as we hear testimonies from others who have grown stronger themselves.

Doubting, without searching can lead to unbelief. But doubting that leads to wrestling and seeking can lead to a much stronger faith than what we started with.

In your bulletin you should have found an index card. I want to take just moment before we sing, to let you write down something you might doubt about the faith – or a question you have wondered about. Jot it down, don't sign it, but put it in the offering plate. I'd like to see what you are thinking and perhaps do some sermon series on the things of faith that we question. So, let's take a moment to think and to write. May God bless our doubts and our search for the truth.