

Doubting Thomas
John 20:24-31

In 279 B.C. the Greeks and Romans fought a battle in Italy, at a place called Asculum – which is just above the heel of the boot.

The Greeks won the battle but the fighting was so fierce and his losses were so great that their commander - King Pyrrhus is reported to have said “*one more such victory and we shall be undone*”

In other words you can lose by winning.

And so whenever a victory comes at an exceptionally high price people will often call it a Pyrrhic victory – thanks to King Pyrrhus.

Perhaps you’ve heard that term used before and maybe you’ve experienced a Pyrrhic victory in your life?

I kind of think that battling and beating cancer with chemotherapy is a Pyrrhic victory – the chemo drugs often do

more damage to the body than the cancer. If you’ve ever known someone who’s gone through chemo you know what I’m talking about.

Or if you’ve ever had to stand up for yourself and report someone who is bullying you, or blow the whistle on some colleagues who are stealing from your employer – it’s the right thing to do, but it will mostly likely cost you some more drama and you’ll get a reputation as a snitch.

Loosing by winning

And friends on Easter Sunday we learned that our response to the Jesus victory over death that writes the ending of the gospel of Mark...

And to help us work through how we respond or might respond to the news of Jesus victory we’re going to look at how some of Jesus disciples reacted and see what Christ has to say to us through that. So we start with Thomas and his reaction as recorded in John’s gospel.

I think Thomas' refusal to believe that Jesus is alive and has appeared to the rest of the disciples is his way of dealing with what would appear to him as a Pyrrhic victory.

I don't think Thomas was refusing to believe because he was the kind of skeptic who didn't believe resurrection from the dead was possible; – after all He would have seen Jesus raise people from the dead...

Friends, I believe that Thomas was bitter and angry about what he had experienced as Jesus disciple in the last week.

Thomas was thinking – Oh sure maybe Jesus is alive again... but look at the toll all this has taken on us, look at what we've had to go through as his followers.

We left our homes and families and our jobs to follow him thinking that it would lead to something better – but now we're been hiding away in a house, we're afraid to show our faces in public.

He was supposed to be the Messiah – when we came to Jerusalem with him He had the support of the crowds, they were shouting praises and ready to make him King. He had the opportunity to take power and lead our people to freedom from the Romans.

How did it all fall apart so fast? For the last week I have been in agony, my hopes and dreams were smashed when they crucified him – I believed in Him!

And now you say “Hey Thomas – we've seen the Lord, we thought he was a ghost at first but then he showed us his hands and feet!

What is this? After everything that's happened this past week, Jesus just walks in and it's all ok with you guys? You're just going to follow Him again so that everything can fall apart again!”

So he's alive...big deal. Have you forgotten He was publically executed as a criminal; the religious leaders have condemned him and anyone who was associated with him and his cause.

There is no support for him anymore - How is He supposed to continue on as the Messiah after this? What is left for us?

So I'll tell you what I think about the wounds in his hands and feet! I want to stick my finger in those wounds... and I hope it hurts him the way I've been hurt – and then I'll believe! Not!

I'm not going to believe. My hopes and my faith were smashed and I'm not going to put myself out there for anyone anymore.

You see friends – I think it was all just too much for Thomas; something else died on Good Friday for Thomas in addition to Jesus. The fact that Jesus had come back to life did not bring back what he feels has been lost.

Thomas feels He has lost even though Jesus has won. Does that strike a chord with you friends?

Because the reality is that for better or worse the experiences which we go through shape us, and certain events can leave us

and our view of the world - drastically changed and the Crucifixion has done this for Thomas.

Authors, poets and artists call it a “loss of innocence”
Philosophers and academics call it a “paradigm shift” and we mostly call it a crisis of faith.

There are times when what we experience we can leave us feeling like we've lost even though Jesus has won.

On Easter Sunday we celebrate Jesus' resurrection over death and we proclaim He has new life to give us...

but we're still battling cancer... our marriage isn't getting any better... we're still struggling financially... it doesn't bring back our loved ones who have died... we still can't find a job...

there is still war in our world... people are still hungry, homeless, and abused... people still turn to drugs and alcohol... and people are still more concerned about their image and status instead of helping others...

We say we've won because Jesus is alive... so why do I feel like we're losing?

We might even voice our disillusionment and echo Thomas' words – “unless I see some proof that this victory makes a difference I'm not going to give myself to follow anymore!”

Well friends there is some very practical advice we can glean from the scriptures about dealing with this kind of disillusionment for ourselves or others.

If you are disillusioned... make yourself keep hanging out with other Christians – not because they will cheer you up or offer you the proof you are looking for, but because Jesus works with groups. He said himself – where two or three are gathered in my name... I am there.

And Thomas is confronted by Jesus while they are gathered together in a group...

Now if you know someone who is disillusioned... resist the temptation to try and cheer them up or reason them out of their disillusionment – it won't work

more than likely it will make it harder for them to continue to hang around with you. You just need to hear them out and then let them continue to hang out.

The disciples didn't kick Thomas out for not seeing things the way they did.

And friends, the good news is that Jesus is gentle with those who experience a loss of innocence or a crisis of faith. We read in Isaiah 42:3 this morning concerning the servant of the Lord – the Messiah - Jesus - that “*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*”

Maybe because of things that you have gone through your faith isn't burning as brightly as it could, its only smoking... smoldering... Friends, be reassured Jesus will not grow impatient with you and blow out your candle for good; He will look for a way to rekindle it.

For Thomas this means Jesus shows up to call him on his ultimatum.

Hey Thomas...remember what you said about the wounds in my hands and my side? Well here they are... stop doubting and believe

And I've wondered – does Thomas' faith flare up again because he saw "the proof" that it really was Jesus, or is it because Jesus is able to suddenly appear among them, in a locked house... and that He knows exactly what Thomas has said without being told about it... or because Jesus speaks to him – stop doubting... believe!

Either way there is something that happens to Thomas when Jesus comes to Him that sets him on fire again and moves him past his disillusionment.

"My Lord and my God" He says.

Thomas can see that there is something more that has come alive in Jesus through the resurrection that he didn't see before the crucifixion. It's not a Pyrrhic victory at all.

And the new life that Thomas sees in Jesus somehow makes everything that he's gone through in the past week worth it.

It reminds me of what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:18 where he says "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*"

Thomas realizes he hasn't lost by winning but that Jesus has instead won by losing.

And friends the good news is that we don't have to physically see Jesus in order have Him rekindle our faith and move us past our disillusionment.

Jesus said to Thomas – because you have seen me you have believed...Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet...have believed.

You don't have to see to believe... you can hear, you can read...and believe and still be blessed. That's why our scripture passage goes on to say "*But these things 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.*"

Nick Vujicic was born with-out any arms or legs – it's a miracle that a deformed child like himself actually survived birth and lived. But it was a pyrrhic victory though, what sort of life could a child without arms and legs expect to have?

What made it harder though was that Nick was born into a Christian family and his father was a pastor and He grew up reading and hearing about an all-powerful God who loved us.

Needless to say that listening to stories about Jesus doing miracles and healing people was very hard for Nick. For many years He prayed that God would do a miracle and give him arms and legs... but God did not give Nick arms and legs.

To say that Nick was disillusioned would be an understatement. At 10 years old He was ready to take his own

life - Nick was basically saying that unless he had arms and legs he would not believe that God could have a purpose that He could live for.

But through **reading** a newspaper article one day about another man with severe disabilities, Christ worked in Nick's heart to rekindle his faith to help him understand that his accomplishments in dealing with his disability could inspire others.

So Nick began to learn ways to do things with no arms and legs and discovered that his life wasn't a Pyrrhic victory after all, but a true victory. Through his faith and belief in Jesus Christ He has been empowered to do more than most people who have arms and legs.

He's gained far more than what he thought he lacked. Nick is a living example of how followers of Christ win through loss.

The boy who was born with no arms and legs or hands and feet has become the very hands and feet of Jesus as he travels the

world to share his story and his belief in Jesus which has brought encouragement to millions of people.

Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed.

Because friends we know that in all things – crucifixion, betrayal, cancer, divorce, bankruptcy, being born with no arms or legs – God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

Stop doubting and believe. Amen.