

## What if? Thomas' Brave Question

*Lord God, take these words and speak through them.*

*Take our thoughts and think through them.*

*Take our hearts and fill them with love for you.*

*Through the power of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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There they are, locked in the house that evening. It was dark outside. The sounds of the night were present. You could hear every, single sound for the disciples were not talking.

They were just sitting there, still shocked from the events of the last several days

As we hear in the Gospel reading, Jesus came, and stood among them. It seems to me that they did not realize he was there until he said, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced.

Now Thomas was not with them when this all occurred. Can you just imagine the scene when they caught up to Thomas later?

"Thomas, Thomas, you are not going to believe what happened," they likely said.

Thomas, with a puzzled look on his face says, "What? Tell me."

"It was Jesus; he was with us in the house."

Thomas' puzzled look gets deeper. He says, "What are y'all talking about? Jesus... with you? I don't believe it. Y'all are crazy!"

"No, really Thomas, he was there and he bid us Peace, you know, just like he always has."

"No. No. I don't... I can't. Guys, I just can't. I cannot get my mind to process this. My heart is still hurting from losing our friend. Are you really serious, or is this a joke?" Really guys, quit playing around. What if..."

"What if what, Thomas?"

"I don't know what to do," Thomas thought to himself. "I mean these guys are my friends. And this is serious. I don't think they are pulling my leg. But, what if.... what if they are? What if this isn't true? Oh no, what if it is true? What if Jesus finds out I didn't believe them?"

What if ....."

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What if?

What if, indeed.

A man walked into a church one Sunday while New York, and on this particular day the church was welcoming to the pulpit a young pastor, maybe in his 30s, visiting that day to tell his story and ask for prayer for all that was before him.

"One year ago," he said with a thick Russian accent, "I was living on my parents' couch in their apartment in Moscow, going nowhere, with no direction, getting average grades in some college courses I was taking, and I was an atheist. If somebody would have told me then that today, just 12 months later, I'd be the senior pastor of a large Russian, Presbyterian church in Brooklyn, USA, do you think I would have believed them?"

What if this young atheist refused to listen to God and his call to him? Would he still be on the couch in his parents' house?

What if...

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When I was 7 years old my family was forced out of their home on a legal technicality, and I had to work to help support them.

At age 9 my mother died.

At 22 I lost my job as a store clerk. I wanted to go to law school, but my education wasn't good enough.

At 23 I went into debt to become a partner in a small store.

At 26 my business partner died, leaving me a huge debt that took years to repay.

At 28, after courting a girl for four years I asked her to marry me. She said no.

At 37, on my third try, I was elected to the US Congress, but two years later I failed to be re-elected.

At 41 my four year old son died.

At 45 I ran for the Senate and lost.

At 47 I failed as the vice-presidential candidate.

At 51 I was elected president of the United States.

Who am I? My name was Abraham Lincoln.

At any step in this incredible journey of failures and misfortune... what if Abraham Lincoln had said, "No more, I give up."? History would have been altered.

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What if...

Many of our lives, perhaps even all of our lives... are filled with doubt, mistakes and almost a constant asking of the question, "What if?"

We find ourselves this morning, in the midst of Thomas' doubt. We find ourselves living his insecurities and the conflict between logic and divine. It is likely not an unfamiliar place to find ourselves if we really think about it.

Friends, Thomas is no different than us nor we so different from him.

It is tempting to look on Thomas' doubt as a weakness or a flaw. I mean, what reason would he have not to trust the other disciples? These were all men who have traveled with Jesus, witnessed his acts and loved him with all their hearts; as they did each other.

The easy conclusion here though is that Thomas is weak and so is his faith. And that would be wrong. Let me tell you why.

Thomas is a brave man... and very wise, perhaps by accident or perhaps not. But, he is brave enough to voice his doubts. He is brave enough to acknowledge that he needs proof.

Without doubt, one cannot learn. Without learning, one cannot grow.

Thomas was not afraid to ask "What if?" for he knew that is how he had grown in the Lord throughout their whole time together. And, it is our lesson today.

What are our "What ifs?"

What if we had conversation with the folks that visit our food pantry to invite them into a relationship with this parish and Jesus Christ?

What if?

What if every Thursday night, a group of us were at the laundromat with bags of quarters and boxes of detergent and we helped folks with their laundry and share our love of Jesus with them?

What if?

What if we filled the freezer in the kitchen with casseroles so that those who come to us to be fed could take a ready-made meal home with them along with their bag of food?

or

What if we did many times more for Eva Turner School than we do now?

What if... What if every time a new person walked in that door back there, when they left, they knew that this church was something greater than themselves and they wanted to be involved?

What if?

What does your "what if" list look like? What difference are you going to make?

Yesterday, the Diocesan Planning Meeting for Southern Maryland gathered in Hamilton Hall. There were 80-90 leaders of the Episcopal Churches in Southern Maryland in the room, both Lay and Clergy. Our day was filled with "what ifs".

In the processes of all of these discussions, explorations and visioning, a gentleman stood up and asked a question of the whole room. His question was this.

"What if your parish went away, would the community even notice?"

What if?

Thomas had the courage to stop, think and ask, "What if?"

Do we?

Amen.