

April 23, 2006

(adapted from a sermon preached by Dr. Ed Robinson at Shawnee Church of the Nazarene, April 26, 1992.)

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“It’s Sunday!...But, uhh, Monday’s Coming.”

John 20:24-31 NLT

One of the disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin ), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. He said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway."

30 Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life.

Remember last Sunday? We had a great time didn't we.

Last Sunday was Easter Sunday. I woke up that morning with a song in my heart. I felt like shouting and singing at the top of my lungs, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Halleluiah." But since it wasn't quite 6:00 in the morning, I didn't think my wife and son , who weren't up yet would appreciate that. So I just sang quietly to myself.

And then I came to church. It was Easter Sunday. The church was filled, the kids had a party, we had a time of fellowship between services and in our services we rejoiced in having a living Savior. It was a holy day. It was Easter.

I talked about how we have "Friday's in our lives, but Sunday is coming." Remember that?

But then I got up on Monday, and I read the newspaper, and people were still being killed in the Middle East. And I read this week how a gang member killed an innocent person because the gang hadn't reached their quotas for murders. There were still problems in Washington, and the Mets lost a series to the Braves ... again.

When I came to the office on Monday, everything was still there. I was just as busy as the week before, in fact, maybe a little more so. I got to thinking that all those who had

cancer last week, have cancer this week. And almost all the people I know who were in strained and broken relationships last week, are in strained relationships and broken relationships this week. Those who were out of work last week were still out of work on Monday. People who were starving to death in many places of the world last week, don't really have any more food this week. And I started to ask myself the question . . . "If everything's changed . . . then what IS different?" I called this message, "It's Sunday! ...But, uhh, Monday's Coming." Or maybe I should have called it, "Sunday has come and gone, now it's Monday and I still am experiencing my Friday." But that titled seem just a bit too long. So where is our Sunday? what IS different?"

I'm an logical type of person, and I want to be able to line things up and have them make sense. I want to be able to see something, and have it make sense. What I really needed about the middle of this past week, as I was thinking about the high and holy day of Easter, and if everything really was changed was a sign. I needed somebody to place a sign in front of me to prove, or at least reassure me, somehow that things actually were different than they were before. And I started to think of Thomas. Poor Tom gets a bad rap.

I can identify with Thomas. In fact, I try to go easy on the guy because he's a lot like I am. We like to talk about his doubting, but the truth of the matter was Thomas really wasn't a doubter. Thomas was just one of those kinds of people who likes to be able to see things clearly, line them up, and figure them out. There were many times in Scripture when Thomas proved his devotion to Jesus.

But then Thomas and the other disciples experienced that Friday we call Good Friday. Their leader Jesus was put to death. They were confused and scared. But then something unexpected happened. Following His resurrection Jesus appeared to a group of disciples.

Thomas wasn't there, but their report to him was: "The Master, our Lord Jesus is alive."

Now for Thomas, that just wasn't logical. He couldn't handle that. That wasn't the kind of information that fit his analytical way of thinking. And therefore, unlike some who might just get swept up in the emotion of it all, Thomas said: "No. Unless I can actually see those wounds in his hands and place my fingers in them, and unless I can actually see and touch the place they speared his side, then I can't believe . . . because I need that kind of proof to line things up for me."

For Thomas it appeared as though nothing was really different. The other ten disciples were still huddled up in that little room for fear of their lives. The Romans were still in charge. The Pharisees were still celebrating. NOTHING had changed for Thomas! He needed a sign. Just like you and just like me, Thomas needed a sign.

But you know something? Thomas wasn't the first one, because all the way through Scripture, when confronted with the impossible, great people of faith have asked God for a sign. When things didn't fit into the plan, when things didn't make sense at all, some of God's finest have asked for a sign.

Thomas was not a completely faithless man. Let's take it easy on Thomas. We should probably be thanking him for helping to reveal a little bit about ourselves. Because there are times when we sure could use a sign.

Last week was great. Last Sunday was wonderful! We soared in our spirits and we cried and sang and shouted: "Hallelujah!" But Monday came, just like Monday always does. And we need a sign on Monday, that what happens on Sunday is real.

And so I started asking myself, I said, "Self, where are your signs?" And I began to think about some of the moments where signs were given to me.

I remembered kneeling at an altar and praying, "Jesus, forgive me, I want to know I will go to heaven when I die. I don't know if I can do all you want me to do, but if you will save me, I'm willing to try." And my life was transformed. And I reached out and I put my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And when I took Holy Communion for the first time as a true believer and I heard the words: "This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken for you. And this cup is His shed blood given for you for the forgiveness of your sins." What Joy I experienced. I place my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And when I was baptized to publicly profess my faith, and when I came out of that water, what a joyous time. And I placed my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And I remembered when my son, Jesse was born and someone told me that Jesse meant, "God exists." And I thought, "yes, that was my testimony as I experienced his birth. It was putting my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And I remembered when I didn't know how I was going to pay the rent. And someone gave me an envelope and said, "God wants me to give you this, if I don't I would be disobeying the Lord." And it was the exact amount I needed. And I reached out and I put my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And I remembered the time God brought healing to my physical body. And I reached out my fingers and placed them in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And I remembered the moments of discouragement, when a friend came, not to give me great advice, but simply to place their arms around me, and to say: "I am here. I don't know what to do. But I am here." And in that moment, I have placed my finger in the hand of the crucified Christ.

Or those times of prayer or in God's Word when I knew God was with me and gave me a Scripture to minister right to me. Just what I needed to hear. It was then that I reached out my fingers and placed them in the hands of the crucified Christ.

And I remembered when my best friend died...I really believed God was going to heal him. And his brother, his twin brother, said, "My brother has been healed." And I felt the peace and even joy, in a moment of grief and sorrow . . . I took my finger and I placed it in the hand of the crucified Christ.

And when I see some who was not a believer and then see their lives transformed by the power of God's Holy Spirit, and I see them renewed . . . I place my fingers in the hands of the crucified Christ. New Christians are a sign!

You know . . . God's really good to give us a sign. The signs are all around us. The signs happen to us every day and every week.

My friends, the fact that you and I are gathered in this church this morning is a sign. Because of the very fact that we are coming here together and trying to build a community that reflects His character, every Sunday morning that we walk into this sanctuary we might as well place our fingers in the hand of the crucified Christ. For you and I are a sign that He is risen! Last Sunday was Easter . . . and WE ARE BACK!

And our response is the same as Thomas' response. The Scripture never records that he put his fingers in Jesus' hands, or that he put his hand in Jesus' side. He didn't ever get that far.

The one who had to be so logical, and literal, and had to line everything up, came up short of really fulfilling what he said he would have to do to believe. All Jesus had to do was talk to him and say: "Thomas, here I am." And Thomas cry out: "MY Lord and MY God." And our cry is the same.

Oh, there are many other signs. More than can be written in this book. And if we would share the signs of the risen Christ among us this morning, it would take us a long time, and we would all miss lunch and dinner today, tomorrow, and the next day after that. But these signs are given to us that we might believe, and that by believing we might have life in his name.

Do you need a sign this morning? Look for one. Oh, not up in the sky. Look for one next to you – across the aisle from you – in your own home. For wherever God's people are ...God has a sign.