

WD April 12, 2021
Pastor Matthew Woods

“Transitions of Life” John 20:24-31

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these 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.

Milestones of 25 Years Ago

Twenty-Five years ago, this year a lot of things changed for me. In the span of about two months I managed to celebrate several milestones that I had been working and praying for most of my life. After fifteen years of stops and starts I managed to finally receive my black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Shortly after that I graduated from Seminary. So many times, I considered stopping and doing something else. I had been offered construction jobs; an opportunity to go back to Yosemite and work with youth; even to be a manager of a Pizza Hut in Ypsilanti, Near Eastern Michigan University, which was not far from Concordia, Ann Arbor where I did my undergrad. Somehow, I hung in there and reached my goal to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church.

So, after graduation I was ordained as a Pastor in my home congregation in Michigan and then later installed in my first congregation in Indiana. And most importantly, between my ordination and installation I married my bride. This year marks our 25th anniversary.

Yes, all of these milestones that I had been working toward and striving for, praying for, and wondering about all rallied to fulfillment within about a two month period. It was exciting and strange and disorienting and also reflective. It was probably the most significant time of transition in my life.

I had to stop thinking like a student and start thinking as a Pastor. I had to stop thinking as a single man and be a husband. The transitions also signified that I had to stop being one thing and become another. And we all do it. If we live in one house for decades and then move that's a major transition especially if the move takes us out of state. When Mitzi, our previous youth director retired it was a major change to us here at Grace. Now Rosie has taken over and is running with the program; and doing a great job by the way. Our whole lives are a state of transitions from one thing to the next. And often it takes time to adjust.

Big Changes for Thomas

A similar thing is going on when disciples are trying to convince Thomas that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. Jesus had been saying for all three years of training that He would suffer at the hands of the chief priests, be crucified, and on the third day be raised to life again. Yet the disciples didn't remember that part of their training or seem to tune into it for one reason or another. So, on Easter the disciples were in the midst of a lot of change in a short period of time. I know from experience that rapid changes can be very unsettling and cause a sense of uncertainty. Then add in mourning a loved one and your world is turned up-side-down. Being a disciple on Maundy Thursday was a joy. Suddenly, being a disciple of Jesus on Good Friday felt more like an ending rather than a transition. But it was a transition. The sin of the world was bought and paid for. And now the resurrection is preparing us for another transition that will inevitably come to all of us.

I had been preparing for years for the milestones I mentioned already. For three years Jesus had been training twelve men to be His disciples. A disciple is a student of Christ. The disciples were being prepared to become Apostles. An apostle is 'one who is sent'. They could not be sent until everything was accomplished in the cross and the resurrection. The followers had nothing to celebrate until there was a resurrection, a change from death to life. However, the resurrection would change the world and the Apostles would be the messengers to do it.

And so back to Thomas. Thomas was stuck in mourning for a week. He kept looking back and reliving the events of Good Friday. I can imagine Thomas thinking to himself, "What were the last three years for? And why did all seem to go so wrong?" And with each day his doubts raised. With each attempt by the other ten to convince him that they had seen the Lord he resisted. Finally, Thomas put up his challenge. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my and into his side, I will not believe it."

Challenge accepted. The resurrected Jesus appears and insists that Thomas touch His wounds. "Stop doubting and believe...because you have seen me you believe; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." When faith takes hold another transition of sorts takes hold of Thomas. No longer a doubter. No longer a mourner. Thomas is a believer. Thomas is part of the group again. Thomas is now not just a disciple but also an apostle and more ready to be sent than before.

Big Changes for Us

Likewise, a change happens for us in Baptism. Romans 6:3-4 is quick this out. "3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." And 2 Corinthians 4:16 tells us, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." A change happens in us every time we are forgiven; each day when God's grace remakes us again. The hard part is moving forward from the past toward the future. The challenge is to let go of our sinful nature and pursue a godly one.

Another challenge is to keep building on the new things that come. I wouldn't be much a husband if I acted like a single man in the relationship. As a single man I spent time how I wanted without having to include others. I drove where I wanted; spent money on things I wanted or needed, etc. As a married man being a single man doesn't work. Spending time and money must be considered as a team. There must be agreement to work together for common

goals and lifestyles. A marriage by its nature moves my wife and I forward while at the same time celebrating all the good stuff of 25 years. For us our history makes the future work. And there will be many more changes in the years ahead. But one transition will always remain when all of our years are spent.

The last and greatest change as we all know happens in death. Yet, in the resurrection is our greatest milestone. Because we have a history with Jesus, we are called blessed; believing in Jesus in spite of doubts, trouble, loss, and joy we have an established future. Philippians 3:20-21 tells us that Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Talk about a change! I can imagine this last and greatest transition will take some getting used to I’m sure but I don’t think we will mind. So, celebrate the milestones. And take comfort in the transitions that can and do come in life. Change is inevitable...daily, in fact...especially for we who are the blessed ones who have not yet seen but believe.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

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John 3:30