

## **“Is Your Faith Up to This Challenge?”**

### **John 11:1-16**

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Perhaps he was waiting for Peter to speak. After all, Simon Peter was the leader of the disciples, a part of Jesus' inner circle of confidants, and the spokesman for the group. Rarely, if ever was he at a loss for words. In all likelihood, Thomas was waiting for him to speak again as he usually did.

When he realized Peter was going to remain silent, he spoke up. “Let us also go that we may die with him,” Thomas said in response to Jesus' insistence that he return to Bethany to help his dear friends, Lazarus, and his sisters, Mary and Martha.

His words did more than get the disciples moving. They revealed an unparalleled level of loyalty, commitment and leadership. Quite frankly, it was outstanding and Thomas is to be commended for his bravery.

We are not accustomed to seeing Thomas in such a positive light. He is usually associated with doubting because of his response to the news of Jesus' resurrection. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my fingers where the nails were and put my hand in his side, I will not believe” John 20:25.

In today's text, we see a completely different Thomas, a committed follower of Jesus that was willing to pay the ultimate price to accompany Jesus to Bethany. What a contrast this is to his post-resurrection image. Which one is the real Thomas? Actually both of them are.

This morning I want us to look at Thomas through the lens of John 11. This story will shed light upon a remarkable man of faith and good role model for all believers. Let me explain.

When Jesus received word that his good friend Lazarus was gravely ill, he made plans to return to Bethany, a village near Jerusalem. Upon telling his disciples, they tried to discourage him.

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going to go back there?” John 11:8. It is evident that they feared for his safety. Their insistence that he not return did not persuade him to change his mind, though. Jesus was determined to go, even if he had to go alone.

When Thomas realized this, I wonder if he waited for Peter to speak. After noticing that Peter was not going to break the silence, and quite frankly I am not surprised because Peter never encouraged Jesus to take risks, it appears that Thomas took the lead and insisted that the disciples go with Jesus even though there was a high price to pay for doing so. “Let us also go, that we may die with him” John 11:16.

Yes, I see in Thomas an unparalleled level of loyalty, commitment and leadership. He reveals what it means to take up a cross and follow Jesus. He was fully aware of the risk and danger of going near Jerusalem during Passover, yet he was willing to go down that perilous road. Why?

**I think he did it because he believed in Jesus and the work he was doing.** I don't think that Thomas fully understood what was happening in Bethany and why Jesus insisted on going, but that wasn't necessary at this point. What was necessary was placing trust in Jesus and following him as he had done for almost three years.

Thomas believed in Jesus. He knew his heart and felt his passion. He saw the difference he had made in so many lives and knew that he represented the only hope some people had that their lot in life would improve. He believed in Jesus enough to invest his life in helping him to make hope visible and he wasn't going to turn back now just because the risk was high. So, he followed Jesus into the eye of the storm and convinced the other disciples to follow him.

**I also believe Thomas felt a great sense of compassion for Jesus and wanted to be there for him during the darkest hours of his life.** Thomas knew that Jesus had to be dealing with two powerful emotions at this time, grief and fear. One of his dearest friends was dying. Helping him could lead to his own death. Surely, Thomas felt the tension and saw the stress that Jesus was under. His heart had to ache for Jesus and he could not abandon him, at least not now. Friends don't desert friends in their hour of greatest need, and Jesus was Thomas' friend.

So what did he do? He took the lead and rallied the troops. If there ever was a time Jesus needed someone to step in and do this, it was then, and Thomas rose to the occasion. Love compelled him to do the difficult, take risks and go places he would rather have avoided.

Every parent understands what I am talking about this morning. Your children will take you places you would rather not go. Why do you travel down those roads? Love compels you to do the difficult, doesn't it?

Every loving relationship will demand that you take risks and travel down perilous roads. Just ask Thomas, the one who bravely said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

**How would you measure your level of commitment to Christ and his mission?** What kind of disciple are you? How much of your life have you invested in the work of our Lord? Have there been times when you have taken the lead and rallied others to follow Jesus?

What risks have you taken or sacrifices have you made to continue his good work? Where do you need to go and what do you need to do that will require great courage? Is your faith up to this challenge?

For me, one of the lessons in this story is the importance of faith. Thomas had to believe with all his heart that Jesus knew what he was doing and that more would be lost if he did not

follow Jesus than gained if he refused to do so. Martha and Mary had to make that decision, too, as the text later reveals. What about you? Do you have this kind of faith?

**Who needs you to walk with them in the darkest hour of their life?** Mary, Martha and Lazarus needed Jesus. Jesus needed the disciples. Who do you know that is struggling with grief and fear that needs your help? What road do you need to travel with them so they will not be alone? What difference could you make in their life by being their friend? How would your compassion and courage inspire and strengthen them?

**Who walked with you and made a difference when you needed someone the most?** You will never forget them, will you?

I don't think Jesus ever forgot Thomas' compassion and bravery. Perhaps this was the reason he was so kind and understanding when Thomas struggled with the news of Jesus' resurrection. If you recall, Jesus made a second appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room a week after the resurrection just to talk to Thomas. Why did he do that? I think he remembered what Thomas had done for him during one of the most difficult times of his life and wanted to return the favor.

Do you need to return a favor or do for someone that is struggling what was done for you by a dear friend? Ask the Lord to help you make that journey of compassion and goodwill. After all, he's familiar with the road you need to travel.