

## **Second Sunday in Easter, James Livingston**

**"If anything happens to me,  
I'll be looking down from heaven at you all.  
I love you."**

**Words on a note from Josh Napper,  
a West Virginia coal miner who  
alongside 28 others  
was killed in a mine explosion on Monday.**

**If those miners survived the initial blast, then they knew fear.  
Trapped in a dark, collapsed mine  
facing what they did not know at the time,  
would be their tragic and imminent death.**

**Is this the same fear that the disciples faced?  
Hiding in an upper room after the loss of their friend  
their rabbi?  
Their messiah?**

**As the authorities dealt with Jesus,  
would their sentence be the same?**

**The disciples feared for their lives amidst  
confusion, fragility, and doubt  
hiding behind locked doors,  
doors locked from faith  
doors locked from trust  
doors locked from belief.**

**And yet these doors, these obstacles are nothing to the risen Christ.  
Jesus breaks through our fear with peace and love,  
and leads us beyond doubt  
to true faith in our Lord and our God.**

**Yet, fear remained for the disciples  
despite the encouraging message they had  
received from Mary Magdalene,  
"I have seen the Lord."**

**The scene of these men and women cowering in hiding  
conjures up all too familiar stories of other Jews in hiding**

**from the Nazis.**

**Fitting, as tomorrow, April 12<sup>th</sup>, is National Holocaust Day.**

**As the Allies moved through Germany at the end of World War II,  
searching farms and houses for snipers,**

**searchers found these words on the wall of a cellar in Cologne**

**I believe.**

**I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.**

**I believe in love even when feeling it not.**

**I believe in God even when God is silent.**

**Why is it then, that Thomas is called “the doubter?”**

**Actually, Thomas was the only one who dared to go outside,  
to risk being caught.**

**But while he was away, Jesus appeared before the other disciples.**

**Thomas missed the big surprise**

**like missing the punchline of a joke**

**like missing the game winning shot because you were away for  
that one moment that really mattered,  
when something amazing took place.**

**Thomas was left in the dark.**

**All he got upon his return were the looks on the faces of the others;  
surprise, joy, elation!**

**Almost speechless except for the claim,**

**“we have seen the Lord!”**

**For Thomas, to come to the light required having that same experience  
as his comrades.**

**This is not an outright refusal of the possibility of the resurrection,  
in fact, given their claim, Thomas' criteria is appropriate.**

**His senses need to be satisfied as their's have been.**

**To see his glorious face,**

**to hear the words that bring peace and comfort**

**to connect with the scars on hand, foot, & side.**

**Only the light cast in Jesus' full revelation can break through the  
darkness of unbelief in which Thomas is trapped.**

**“Peace be with you.”**

**Jesus bestows upon them that against which no doubt,  
nor fear, nor disbelief can survive,  
the peace of Christ.**

**Even so, Jesus knows the heart of Thomas,  
he knows the measuring stick which Thomas has demanded  
to be used, and so Jesus offers it.**

**“Put your finger here and see my hands.  
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.  
Do not doubt but believe.”**

**Thomas has waited for this moment for a week since the news of his  
friends of Jesus' return.**

**Perhaps he has been waiting his whole life  
to know for sure that the promises of Jesus of Nazareth are true,  
that the messianic prophecy is fulfilled,  
and scripture is laid out before him  
with irrefutable proof.**

**Does Thomas touch Jesus? I don't think he does.**

**Instead he does something fundamentally greater  
than gain one more miniscule scrap of tactile data for his test,  
he utters the supreme Christological pronouncement of  
the entire Gospel:**

**“My Lord, and my God!”**

**“My Lord and My God!”**

**The doors of containment burst open in Thomas' heart!**

**He awakens and is released from the darkness of his unbelief,  
and is ushered into the brilliance of the truth of Christ.**

**Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is risen.**

**“My Lord and My God!”**

**These words are awesome, chilling, so powerful!**

**It triggers a flashback that recalls Jesus' teaching,  
tying together the *man* as the *Eternal Word of God*.**

**It allows us to replay the events of His life,**

**to see how they all point to his divinity,**

**to see Christ the King as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,**

**the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.**

**With these words we are whisked back in time,  
to the very beginning of the Gospel  
to the very beginning of creation.**

**“In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.**

**He was in the beginning with God.”**

**And then throughout Jesus' ministry we remember his words:  
Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.**

**Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness  
but will have the light of life.”**

**Jesus said, “Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life,  
so also the Son gives life.”**

**Jesus said, “The Father and I are one.”**

**A quote from one commentator reads,**

**“The author has shared his belief in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of  
God, by means of the story from which the reader now rises. The  
journey of Jesus and the journey of the reader have been completed, but  
the story-telling is successful only if the one rising from the story has  
become part of it, led more deeply in Jesus and all he has made known  
about God, and comes to life as a result of the reading experience.”  
(Harrington, 1998)**

**Now our senses have been challenged,  
from behind a locked door, Jesus has entered  
where we saw Him dead on the cross, Jesus stands before us  
though we laid Him in a tomb, Jesus is among us.**

**Death has been defeated by Christ's resurrection,  
and by this we know He is God.**

**I do not know how Thomas received this message from Christ.**

**Perhaps he was kneeling, perhaps he was crying.**

**But I know that the words of Thomas are heard by many,**

**“My Lord, and my God!”**

**From this, Jesus questions Thomas in what seems to be a bemused tone;  
“Have you believed because you have seen me?”  
And then, something like an extra beatitude for us;  
“Blessed are those who have not seen  
and yet have come to believe.”  
We are those who have not seen, but believe,  
the writings on the wall in Cologne attest to the belief of  
those Jews in hiding  
Josh Napper from West Virginia believed.**

**As the disciples of Christ, we have been commissioned by the same Holy  
Spirit that sent out the first twelve.  
Jesus has breathed upon us that same breath,  
the breath that gave life to Adam and Eve,  
that breath that calmed and strengthened the first disciples.  
He has given us that same breath of life  
that we might go forth into the world  
with gladness and singleness of heart,  
to be witnesses and bearers of His message,  
His life, His promise to all.  
Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”**

**Jesus breaks through our fears with His peace and love,  
imploring us to forgive all people their sins,  
When we do this, we are lead like Thomas beyond doubt  
into true faith in our Lord and our God.**