

The one time I don't show up and I'm labeled for life. That's not fair. None of my other buddies believed Jesus was back from the dead, either. But they didn't get stuck with a new nickname. Peter was still the Rock. John was still the one Jesus' loved. James and John were still the Sons of Thunder. I used to be the Twin. I'd prefer my given name, Thomas. But everyone calls me the "Doubter."

Let me explain. My buddies ... you call us disciples ... we were all together in a room, scared to death. I mean they were all together. I wasn't there. Don't ask me where I was. May I continue? It had been 3 days since Jesus was crucified. I'll never be able to unsee that. When they claim Jesus walked into the room without opening the door.

I was suspicious. Not that he didn't use a door, but that it was Jesus. As scared and frightened as they were, who knows what they thought they saw. You know fishermen. They always exaggerate how many fish they caught, or how big the ones were that got away.

Not me! I'm not easily fooled. I told them: **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."** I need to see things with my own eyes and touch things with my own hands. Why are you looking at me like that? Do you always believe everything you're told? What's that? I already told you: *"Don't ask me where I was that night. I had some personal things to take care of."*

Can we get back to my story? Put yourself in my sandals. If someone came up to you 3 days after you attended the funeral of a friend, and said, *"You'll never guess who I just saw. I know he died last week, but he looks great!"* See, you wouldn't believe it either. You never hear about people coming back from the dead.

Maybe *never* isn't the right word. I did see Jesus raise Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus in Bethany. That's right, I saw Jesus raise Jairus'

daughter in Capernaum. Oh, and when we were in Nain, I also saw him raise the widow's son. Maybe I should have expected it.

But I was devastated when Jesus was crucified. 3 years of my life down the drain. My faith, my hope, my dreams ... all crushed. You can relate to that, even at your age. Life has dealt you some painful and unexpected setbacks. Have any of you broken a bone? Been real sick? Got sad news? Maybe you didn't get the grade you were hoping for. It hurts. You feel crushed. That's how I felt.

Anyway when my buddies saw Jesus' hands and feet and side ... they were all fresh wounds. They started to dance and hug each other. Tears ran down their faces. They said they went from hopelessness to hopefulness and from despair to delight.

And sure enough, they were right. Exactly one week later in the same room in the same house, with the same group of guys, myself included this time, Jesus did the same thing. He walked into the room without opening the door. We kept it locked. You never know. Being associated with Jesus might be as hazardous to us as it was to him.

So many things happened over the past 2 weeks, let's go back farther, to the past 3 years. The things Jesus does shouldn't shock me anymore, but he still manages to do it.

Here's what he did this time. Jesus came into the room, evidently not using a door is a favorite of his, walked over to me, held out his hands and showed me his side and said: **"Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe."** How did Jesus know that I had demanded evidence I could see and touch when he wasn't even there? Well anyway, that's how I became known as the disciple who doubted Jesus was alive. Doubting Thomas, for short. Unfortunately, the nickname stuck.

I saw the nail marks, and touched the spear wound. Then it hit me like a bolt of lightning. Everything Jesus had been saying for the past 3 years fit together. He was the One everybody had been waiting for. He was the Savior who kept his word. He died then rose again. That's why I immediately confessed: **"My Lord and my God!"**

There was something else Jesus said to me that night and it's kind of eerie. Jesus announced: **"Peace be with you."** Here's the eerie part. My buddies told me he said the exact same thing to them when he walked in the room a week earlier. Peace, or as we like to say *Shalom*, is a greeting among Jewish friends.

But when *Shalom* came from Jesus' lips it meant much more than when we say it. You or I can only wish someone peace, or wish someone well. We don't have the ability to deliver it.

Jesus can actually deliver *Shalom*, between a God who demands perfection and people incapable of perfection. That peace came at a very steep and painful price. It cost Jesus his life on the cross.

Jesus delivered peace to every sinner. Even sinners like me and my buddies, who after 3 years of daily lessons from Jesus, still deserted him, betrayed him, denied knowing him and doubted him.

That peace, that free and full forgiveness Jesus offers lifted a heavy load of sin and guilt off our hearts. My buddies and I are speaking from experience when we say all is well between us and our God.

The peace Jesus won on the cross is meant for you, even when you forget some of the things you've learned over the past 2 years of daily lessons from your Bible. He forgives you for those times when you deserted him, when you betrayed him, when you denied him or when you doubted him.

There's something else that Jesus told me that I wanted to tell you. You need to treasure this, not just today, when you're confirmed, but every day. Jesus wants to bless you in way that I could never

be: **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

I believed because I got to see and touch him. Anyone who doesn't see him like you ... and yet believes ... he calls *blessed*. *Blessed* means favored by God. You are on the receiving end of God's favor when you walk by faith and not by sight.

Faith is a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He works it in hearts through God's Word whether in a baby at baptism, or an aging Christian who doesn't remember so well, or a teenager on their confirmation day.

I need to be honest with you. People will ask you: *"Where is your God? Can't see him. Can't touch him. Maybe it's your imagination. Why should I believe in your Jesus?"* They've asked me, too.

I always come back again and again to some words of Jesus: **"No one comes to the Father except through me."** Jesus is in a class all by himself. He's the only Savior there is, the only way to the Father. That's not a popular teaching in your world. Many people want to think that all religions end up with God in heaven, they just take different paths to get there. But Jesus' words: **"No one comes to the Father except through me"** leaves no alternate path.

Believe the witness of my buddies! Believe what my buddies wrote down about Jesus in your Bibles. Believe what your pastor taught you over the last 2 years. Jesus lived and died as your substitute. And without a doubt believe he rose from dead, just like he said.

And for heaven's sake, don't be like me. I stayed away on Easter and I really missed out. I missed out on seeing Jesus. Don't stay away or you'll be missing out, too. You don't want to miss out on seeing Jesus here.