

## THE EPISTLE OF THOMAS TO THE LAWRENCEFIELDERS

### *Sermon for Easter 2A- Jn 20:19-31*

LPC, 4/23/17

What I am about to read to you is not so much as sermon as it is a bit of creative writing inspired by scripture. This means you must not assume it is necessarily supported by orthodox scholarship, as my usual sermons aspire to be. This is very much my own invention. I pray that I am not too far off track. But if I am, the beauty and wisdom of good Episcopal liturgy puts the creed right after the sermon, so we are sure to end up in the right place.

*Thomas Didymus, known as “The Twin,” a disciple of Jesus Christ, to the saints at Lawrencefield, greeting. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I write to you across time and space in the hope that you may benefit from my experience, in case you find yourselves in a similar situation to the one in which I found myself some centuries ago.*

*First off, I should probably confess that I was never the best disciple. I am called “the doubter,” but that’s not really fair. I preferred to think of myself as a realist. I have seen cults and charismatic leaders come and go. The Lord called people “sheep” and that may be too kind. Verily, the way that crowd turned against the Lord is a case in point. Someone starts shouting something mad and before long normally rational people are behaving like wild beasts.*

*It is hard to describe how unspeakably awful it was. We saw him in the midst of that ugly mob. We saw the way the wind was blowing. We literally ran for our lives. It is easy to condemn us in retrospect, but any of you might have done the same.*

*Once the evil deed was done and he hung there on the cross, we ventured back, keeping our heads low. Crucifixions are always horrible, that’s why the Romans put so much stock in their deterrent value, but when it is someone you have known and loved... verily, there are no words. Seeing him suffering and dying was bad enough, but there was more.*

*The guilt of having abandoned him was overpowering. Now, none of us doubted that if we had come to his defense we’d be hanging there beside him. Besides, he had told us, commanded us, not to fight for him. But still, we all wondered, surely there was something we could have done? Should we not have volunteered to take his place? That would probably not have worked. That crowd was out for blood, and it was out for his blood. In any event, we had not acted. It seemed the guilt would be with us forever. But there was more.*

*How we had wanted to believe him when he taught that there was another way to live from the merciless ways of the world! Myself especially. I told you I was a tough nut. I was always the skeptic, asking him, “How can this be?” when he said that love would prevail. Finally I had been persuaded not so much by his words as by the man himself. He seemed incapable of hate.*

*Now hate itself had destroyed him. That vision of a healed world that had at first cost my questioning mind so dearly, and then won my heart and soul ... all that was gone. We were*

*grieving not only for the loss of him, but for the loss of that beautiful vision, for which we had given up all other comfort and assurance.*

*So, as you know, he died. We were in shock, unthinking because to think would have been painful unto death. Without conscious thought we returned to our lodging, barred the door and sat around like dead men ourselves.*

*Finally I couldn't stand it and fled. If I hadn't got out of that room I was sure I'd have gone mad. They tried to keep me there but their hearts weren't in it. Their hearts were as dead as mine.*

*Then, after I returned from a long, miserable walk, they were new men! They'd seen the Lord, so they said. Their elation was inexplicable. That grief had driven them mad was the only reasonable explanation. And as we've seen, hysteria is contagious. I was more tempted to leave them for good than to believe them. Thomas Didymus is nobody's fool. This time I was not getting sucked in.*

*But enough of the Lord's teaching stuck with me that I felt I could not abandon them, especially if they had gone mad. They had become my family after all. They were going to need looking after. Perhaps with loving care, their wits would return to them.*

*I have to admit, over the next week I began to waver. They were so sure. And they were, after all, my brothers. But to believe such as thing as they claimed without empirical proof seemed like a step off a cliff. Where does such credulousness end? Believing in sprites and unicorns? Such things are myths for the weak-minded. From what I know of your time and country, there are lots of people who feel this way in your environment. Perhaps you have thought these things yourself. If so, I particularly address myself to you.*

*A week later, as you have heard, he was there before me too. As it turned out, I didn't even need to put my hand in his terrible wounds as I had threatened so rashly. What convinced me was not even the sight of him, not even the sound of that familiar voice. What convinced me was the way my grief and guilt and fear just vanished in his presence. They were there, and then they weren't.*

*This has got me thinking about how much we call doubt is in fact grief or doubt or fear. Catching a vision of life without grief and guilt and fear is the beginning of faith. And what the Lord offers and supplies is life without grief and guilt and fear. This is what I want to tell you. The Lord has love and forgiveness enough to explode your grief and guilt and fears, and not just yours but the whole world's grief and guilt and fear. Furthermore, grief and guilt and fear cannot stand against this love and will never, ultimately prevail against it.*

*Now if you are skeptical about that, I of all people, understand. I pray that some day you are able, if you aren't already, to at least conceive of your own grief and guilt and fear being gone, because this is the beginning of faith. If this was true for me, it will certainly be true for you.*

*Greet one another with a holy kiss. And the love of Christ our Lord which cannot be destroyed by grief and guilt and fear, be with you all evermore.*