

I have always loved the Thomas part of the gospel story. I love Thomas because I get him. If I were there I could easily see myself being the disciple who needed the proof. It's true that this has very little to do with Thomas and a whole lot to do with frightened disciples hiding behind locked doors. And quite frankly, who can blame them? They just witnessed their mentor, prophet, guide and friend, the one they called Messiah be tried, convicted and executed by religious and civil authorities. If I were a disciple I might be in their company behind closed doors too. I can imagine the fear that we would be next target. Why wouldn't the authorities decide to round up Jesus' closest friends and try them with the same corrupt justice.

Now, I said I might be in their company because I know myself pretty well and I imagine I would more likely be with Thomas. We don't know exactly why he wasn't hiding behind locked doors with the others but it might be because he has decided to remove himself from the situation (from the drama) and get on with living. I tend to be a doer and a fixer (like many of you here), but I don't like to spend a lot of time stressing unless the stress is leading us towards action. So who knows I might have missed Jesus' first appearance to his disciples as well, and I can almost guarantee I would wonder what they were drinking or smoking to have such an experience.

But for the rest of the disciples when Jesus appears to them it appears their fears are relieved and they are filled with awe, wonder and joy once again. Perhaps this is the way faith is supposed to work. Yes, you've got doubts and questions and fears, but when God arrives our doubts and fears all fall away, replaced by joy and wonder and, of course, unshakeable faith.

And yet it is not so easy for Thomas. "He doubts. He questions. He disbelieves. He's not satisfied with second-hand reports and wants to see for himself. And again I would say, who can blame him? He was, after all, one of those who saw his Lord and friend mistreated, beaten, and then crucified and has probably spent the last few days pulling the broken pieces of his life back together and trying to figure out what to do next. In fact, he might have already started getting on with his life."¹ Maybe he gave up his faith and let go of all that Jesus had said to him for the last few years, or maybe he had been listening carefully and he was out trying to live the abundant faith filled God life he thought Jesus would want him to live. We don't know...but I wonder.

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/03/easter-2-c-blessed-doubt/>

I wonder because... here we are in church- it is the week after Easter. We have celebrated the resurrection. We have chanted the words “Christ is Risen, Risen Indeed.” And I know that many of us said those words with wonder, doubt, questions. Perhaps some of you even left the service and wondered what you had just seen and experienced. We enter into these celebrations of faith with many theologies and contexts. Some of us believe in a physical resurrection, some of us believe in a spiritual resurrection. Some of us simply believe and I imagine with all of our wonderings that there are one or two Thomas's in the room.

“Thomas does come to believe. He sees Jesus for himself. And after that experience he not only assents or consents to the witness of his comrades but makes the most profound confession of faith about Jesus contained in the New Testament, calling Jesus “my Lord and my God.”

But all of that comes after he has a chance to voice his doubt. And sometimes faith is like that – it needs the freedom of questions and doubt to really spring forth and take hold. Otherwise, faith might simply be confused with a repetition of creedal formulas, or giving your verbal consent to the faith statements of others. But true, vigorous, vibrant faith comes, I think, from the freedom to question, wonder, and doubt.

Not for everyone, of course. For some, faith comes more easily. Maybe many of the other disciples were like that (although lets not forget that they got to see what Thomas asked for!). ...

we have no idea what the other disciples thought of Thomas’ initial skepticism. Maybe they were scandalized. Or maybe they sympathized. Further, I suspect that John’s whole point in including this story in his Gospel is to affirm the faith of his community, a group of people who “had not seen yet believed.”²

So this Sunday I want to make a little room for doubt because doubt for me has been the greatest enhancer of my faith. See I grew up in a tradition that felt they had all the answers and there was no room for questions or doubt. From a very young age I could recite a long list of scriptures, and I was told exactly what I was to believe, and if I believed and did what I was instructed that made me a Christian. When I began to question and doubt I was told I was not faithful and ultimately I was asked to leave the church because of my questions. That is a long story for another day.

² IBID

I tried to leave the faith but I always felt the tug of the Spirit and like Thomas in my doubts I encountered the risen Christ. In my doubts I discovered truth. I would not be honest if I didn't tell you that to this day I have moments of doubt and moments where things I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt get challenged. That is why I love Thomas - they say he is a twin - perhaps he is my twin - or perhaps he is yours. In fact I would be as bold to say with all the discrepancies and unbelievable happenings within the scriptures if you have never had any doubts or questions you probably have not taken our faith story too seriously.

As David Lose puts it "I mean, really – think about what we confess when we come together on Sundays: that the Creator of the vast cosmos not only knows we exist but cares deeply and passionately about our ups and downs, our hopes and dreams, and all the rest. This confession is, quite literally, in-credible... And yet we come together and in hearing the Word and partaking of the Sacraments and by being joined to those around us through prayer and song, we come to believe."

I know that for some faith comes with ease. My mother is that way. If I ever struggle her answer is "Pray about it" and she means it. She knows that if we pray we will receive the answer. Personally, I long for that kind of faith. My husband Macky has a very strong faith also. He knows that God will guide us if we trust. He spends a lot less time stressing about the little stuff and a whole lot more time trusting all will be well. I can't tell you how many times he has said to his clergy wife "honey, just have faith."

For some it's easy. For others, more difficult. For some, hearing the testimony of Scripture is enough. For others, they need something more personal and direct. I have had moments in my life where I have seen and heard the Spirit. Like Thomas I have had encounters that have turned my fears and doubts to joy and trust but I needed those moments in my faith so that I could believe like I do today.

So after a Holy Week with an inexplicable rise from death it is okay to have questions. In fact it is living into those questions that usually strengthens our faith. If we are going to get closer and deeper in any relationship we have to ask questions, be open to wonder and experience, why would it be any different with a relationship with God, with our faith? Questions "and wonder and doubt and even skepticism are signs of interest and curiosity and these, quite often, are the soil in which vibrant faith is born."

So I'm going to invite you into an opportunity today. Each of you have a 3X5 card in your bulletin. As we take a moment of silence together right now I invite you if

you have a question of faith to write it down, and then if you would like you can put it into the offering plate when it comes around. And then I'm going to have Nick preach on each of the questions. No seriously perhaps we will do a series or study to take the opportunity to answer some of the questions of faith (in a way I think that is what Nick already does on Thursday nights and maybe that is where they will land but I thought this would be a great opportunity for us to be honest and ask some of our hard questions). Maybe your question is about something in the reading today or within another biblical text. Or they might be the ones you have said you will ask when you arrive at the 'pearly gates.' Maybe it will be rather trivial like Why did God create Mosquitos? Maybe it will be something monumental – why is my loved one in such constant pain? I don't know what your question is, but feel free to ask. You don't have to put your name on the card but you can if you want.

Thomas comes to faith because he first has the chance to voice his doubt and questions and then experiences Jesus for himself. Perhaps that is the opportunity before us this week,

May the questions and wonderings of our faith bring us closer to the Holy this day.
Amen.