

MESSAGE - Dealing with Doubts

Sunday, April 24, 2022

Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford

SCRIPTURE John 20:19-29

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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The lectionary is the collection of Bible readings that follow the church story every year. Beginning with Advent and the anticipation of the Messiah's arrival and ending with Christ the King Sunday. Every year, this Sunday, the Sunday after Easter, is this story. The story of doubt. The story of Thomas.

Thomas seems to have been pigeon-holed; permanently nicknamed:

"Doubting Thomas"

And it's a little unfortunate because the few times that we hear him in the Gospel story, he's not showing doubt.

There's the picture of Faithful and Brave Thomas:

This is when they found out Jesus' friend Lazarus is sick.....

"Let us go that we might die with him!": John 11

And there's the picture of Curious/Seeker Thomas:

At the last supper, when Jesus is giving assurance to the disciples: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going."* <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

"Jesus we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" John 14

And then there's the picture of Doubting Thomas: John 20

But no, he seems to have been permanently labeled as a doubter.

But can we blame him?

What his friends were saying was *impossible*.

He didn't doubt they saw something. He just couldn't wrap his mind around what it is they saw. He probably thought they were seeing a ghost

Might be why he said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

That was what he needed to confirm that what they saw wasn't a ghost.

Maybe instead of just doubt, his statement showed a bit of his curious/seeker side:

"how can we know the way, Jesus?"

But if it was plain old doubt, is that so bad?

Perhaps we have pinned Thomas as Doubting Thomas because faith can be hard. "It's the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things unseen."

But even being hard, we have cast a negative light on having doubts:

Sarai – who laughed at the news she would have a son in her old age

Zechariah – who questioned the angel's news of his wife having a child in her old age.

What are they remembered for? Their doubt.

Do we paint these negative perceptions to try to ward off doubt from ourselves?

That doubt is something we need to avoid?

That we will strive to not be like them?

Nevertheless...try as we might, doubt can/will happen.

*We might call into question the truth of what we heard about God.*

Doubts of God's goodness might arise when we hear about terrible things going on

Doubts that God can still pull a win out over the ways of evil in the world.

Doubts in the church – thus "spiritual, not religious".

My guess is that as much as we don't want this to happen, no matter how much we want to avoid having doubts, perhaps because we think that doubt is the undoing of our faith, it still happens.

Barna Research recently did a study that concluded that have doubts in your faith, is pretty common for most American adults (65%).

So we're not alone. Thomas is not alone.

And Thomas' story gives us permission to deal with the struggles in our faith; he gives us permission to doubt. After all, if he, who physically walked with and talked with Jesus struggled with the resurrection, who can blame anyone 2,000 years later for wrestling with it?

How do we deal with our doubts then?

Unfortunately, according to Barna's research, one of the most commonplace responses to doubt (nearly half) is to leave worship and faith practices, followed by stopping Bible reading and praying and stopping talking with family or friends about spirituality, God or religion.

That problem is: leaving doesn't necessarily help us to work through the doubts/faith struggles.

Instead, in times of doubt, we need to stay engaged.

Like Thomas did.

He could have walked away from them all. Taken his grief, and what he might have imagined as his wasted three years of following Jesus, and gone off to lick his wounds and become closed off.

But he didn't. He hung around. He stayed with those crazy friends who were talking about this impossible thing of Jesus' resurrection.

And because he stuck around, he was able to work it out.

Because he stuck around, he was with them the next time Jesus showed up – a week later.

And Jesus helped him through his struggle.

So what do we do with doubts?

- 1) Stick around.
- 2) Be okay with not knowing everything. Let mystery have room in your heart and mind. (those who weren't comfortable with living with mystery were Adam and Eve)
- 3) Keep seeking/wrestling with it....it brings something deeper.... Fertile soil....Jude 22: be merciful to those with doubts

My story years ago...

You know, Thomas was a twin.

I wonder if we might be his twin?

Yes, twins in dealing with doubts,

But not only that.

Maybe we can be Thomas' twin who is curious/ seeking.

Because then we can be Thomas' twin who is faithful and brave and ready to boldly face whatever lies ahead.

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