

Today, we think about the disciple Thomas . About his bottom line for believing. And about our own dealings with doubt.

Let's start by remembering that Thomas actually believed a great deal. He did, after all, leave everything to follow Jesus. He did believe that he wanted to die with Jesus. He did go out on a mission as one of the 72 and taught and healed and blessed in the name of Jesus. Yet despite all this believing, he is remembered most for his doubting. **' Don't be a doubting Thomas, rely upon God's promise '** is a little song taught years ago in many Sunday Schools. And so many children learned at a young age that there is something seriously wrong with doubting. Once learned, that message sticks like glue. It's a message Jesus would want unlearned. There is absolutely nothing wrong with doubt. When Jesus first appeared to His disciples in that Upper Room, they were ALL doubters. Hiding, scared witless, and hanging together for comfort and safety and prayer. They were muddling through all the "impossible" things they were hearing. Things told to them by Mary, and other women who'd been to the tomb ; or the tale of Jesus appearing at dinner in the home of two people who'd walked the Road to Emmaus with Him. They didn't completely believe He was alive- yet. INTO THAT fear and confusion Jesus came. AFTER THAT, not a one of these people could ever be shaken in their faith in the resurrection of Jesus...not even martyrdom could dissuade them. They believed. Period. What a transformation! But sadly Thomas wasn't there. Out doing something important enough to risk the danger. When he came back, he heard an outrageous tale about Jesus Himself having been there, speaking "PEACE" to them. Thomas was thunderstruck. Flabbergasted. Angry. Thought they were all crazy. "No Way!" says Thomas. "I will NOT believe your words, I have to see and touch and know for myself". Could have caused the first church split ever. "The "I'm right, you're all wrong" kind of thing. It speaks well of the group that passersby did not see a slightly dishevelled Thomas being booted out the window of a two story dining hall.

Somehow, they kept it together, by keeping together. We hear nothing of Thomas being excommunicated or scorned, nor does he wander into the night convinced of his own superiority. Eight days later, the unbelieving Thomas is still with them, still included, still family. And Jesus came back, specifically for Thomas, and invited him to see and touch and

know. Interestingly, Thomas didn't even do the touching...he just fell to his knees and became the very first human being to ever call Jesus "MY GOD". **Peter** had first confessed Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, but Thomas proclaimed Jesus to be God. Please note well that Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for blasphemy, but rather accepted worship as God. We are right to worship Him as God. Not Son of God alone, but God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit: One. And that triune statement of mystery has itself bred centuries of confusion and doubt and argument. **AND HERE IS THE GOOD NEWS: THAT'S OKAY!** Three things we learn from Thomas and Jesus:

**First: doubt is NOT a bad thing.** It is a normal thing. It serves to stir us up to find Truth; It is temporary condition which makes us so uncomfortable that we won't stop seeking until we get to the truth. A great theologian Frederick Beuchner called doubt the "**Ants in the Pants**" of faith. In effect a good "itch" will lead to a good "scratch" and a good scratch at truth will reveal it layer by layer by layer. Doubt is a great motivator.

**Second: doubts are to be shared!** Doubt is dealt with best when it is expressed, not hidden, especially when it is expressed in a community of people who believe. Testing out our faith, asking questions, speaking doubt, and keeping intellectual integrity is something which should be celebrated in every Christian group. Truth can always stand scrutiny. Doubters keep us all honest. It's more than okay. We may need to be little wise and careful about when and where and to whom we express our doubts...just ask Copernicus or Galileo... being imperfect people in an imperfect institution, you may get a response that feels like a put down, or a critical judgement or even bullying. If that happens, it needs to be addressed immediately. Start by talking it over with someone who has proven that they are a safe and trustworthy fellow pilgrim. I want to be that "someone" for any doubter; and there are others within our congregation who do as well. There will be no "tossing Thomas or Thomasina out the window" in this church. The Spirit demands that we stay together in prayer and love and fellowship and **respect.** Period.

**Third: God will faithfully respond to every honest doubter and seeker.** He will not be offended by your hardest questions, deepest fears or doubts. He values your intellectual integrity. How else are we to love Him with all of our minds? Timothy understood that, and

listen to what Timothy says regarding faith: **“prove or test all things, and hang on to only that which is good”**.<sup>i</sup> Jesus told His disciples that when He sent the Holy Spirit, that very Holy Spirit would **lead** them into all truth. Surprise, surprise....they didn’t have it all yet. Neither do we. There are two very present dangers in faith: the first is that we believe everything; and the second is that we believe nothing. We spend our lives moving “in between”. For Christians, there is one **essential “belief”**... it is the very thing that Jesus came “twice” to an Upper Room to “prove”. **That one thing is His resurrection**. Paul says it better than anyone else: **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins...”**<sup>1</sup>. That is the hinge pin. Everything else builds from that... “Jesus Christ is Lord” depends on that. “God is love” depends on that. John even sums up his Gospel with these compelling words: <sup>29</sup> **Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”** <sup>30</sup> **Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.** <sup>31</sup> **But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[a]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[b]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. Amen.**

May we all hold fast to the Resurrected Jesus and live in peace with one another, in and through all things, including doubt. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Thess 5:21

lick on Scripture Lessons below for study links and resources for each individual pericope

**Acts 2:14a, 22-32**

Roman Catholic reading: Acts 2:42-47

**Psalm 16**

Roman Catholic reading: Psalm 118

**1 Peter 1:3-9**

**John 20:19-31**