

Go Ahead; Doubt!

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
Easter 2: John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Doubting Thomas went on to found seven churches in India. Our doubts are essential to a living faith. Jesus didn't back away from Thomas. Instead, on the eighth day, God gave Thomas exactly what he needed.

Beloved of God, grace and peace and life in Jesus' name is ours to have! May it be so this day as it was for Thomas! Amen.

This 2010 cartoon by Joshua Harris says it all. Thomas holds a sign saying, ‘We don’t call Peter “Denying Peter” or Mark, “Ran away naked, Mark”! Why should I be saddled with this title?’ To which another disciple replies, “I see your point, Thomas, but really, it’s time to move on.”

Is it? Why? Why should we move on from questions?

The affirmation that Jesus is the Christ is an act of faith and consequently of daring courage. It is not an arbitrary leap into darkness but a decision in which elements of immediate participation and therefore certitude are mixed with elements of strangeness and therefore

incertitude and doubt. But doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith. Therefore, there is no faith without risk . Paul Tillich, Systematic Theologian.

<https://afterall.net/quotes/paul-tillich-on-doubt-as-an-element-of-faith/>

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith! Anyone want to raise your hand if you have never asked God a question? Had a doubt? Yes, we all have doubts! We all have questions!

Why can't I find a job, Lord? Why does my child struggle with learning disabilities? Why is it so hard, God, to get along with this person?

One of the reasons teaching confirmation and going to camp with youth is so fun, is hearing their questions. "Wasn't Jonah stinky when he got out of the belly of the whale?"

One of the reasons I love spending time with adults is your questions. You should have heard the conversation at Thursday Bible study this week! Whew! Questions flying everywhere! Here a question, there a question, everywhere a question, question. Love it!

If you have ever thought, "Well, I can't come to Bible study because I don't know all the answers," Thomas is your guy!

If you have ever thought, "Well, I can't go talk to the pastor, because I don't understand the Bible," Thomas is your man!

If you have ever wondered and asked God a question, Thomas is your hero. Thomas is our hero.

Here's the truth. No congregation would have pastors, without questions. You've heard me tell of the seminary professor who said, "I'm going to destroy your Sunday school faith in two weeks, and rebuild it in four years." He wasn't kidding.

Neither was Thomas! Thomas only asks for what the other disciples have already had. Thomas asks to see what they've seen. Nail marks. Scars. Evidence that the Jesus Thomas saw on the cross, was truly alive and walking around.

Remember that in John's Gospel, belief is connected to relationship. Belief is connected to relationship. It's not simply standing up and stating facts, "I believe in God, creator of heaven and earth." Like we say, "I believe the sun will come out." Or "I believe the costs of living are going up."

Belief is standing up and saying, “I believe in God, creator of heaven and earth”...trusting there truly is a creator God who is in relationship with us!

This is what happened for Thomas. He put his heart and soul into following this rabbi teacher, Jesus. Thomas trusted him. Thomas loved him. When Jesus died on the cross, so did his relationship with Thomas. Thomas couldn't believe in someone who was dead. The relationship died. Thomas belief in Jesus died also.

Thomas simply needed proof that Jesus lived beyond the grave, so that he, Thomas could believe in Jesus again. Jesus gave Thomas exactly what he needed.

Thomas – like many of the disciples – went on to do amazing things. Tradition says he landed on the southwestern shores of India in 52 CE. There he founded seven churches.

“Thomas Christians, also called **St. Thomas Christians**, **Mar Thoma Christians**, or **Malabar Christians**, indigenous Indian Christian groups who have traditionally lived in Kerala, a state on the Malabar Coast, in southwestern India. Claiming to have been evangelized by St. Thomas the Apostle, Thomas Christians ecclesiastically, liturgically, and linguistically represent one of the oldest Christian traditions in the world, particularly in Christianity outside the West. Although they no longer form a single institutional church, Thomas Christians altogether constitute a vibrant religious community. In the early 21st century there were about four million Thomas Christians in India.”

(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomas-Christians>)

Here are photos of the churches Thomas founded.

This is where doubting can lead! Thomas, faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, went on to start churches and lead people to a living, vibrant faith in our Risen Lord. Jesus breathed on the disciples the Holy Spirit. He gave them all permission to forgive sins and not forgive sins. He grants them all the power and authority to continue and implement the ministry He began while on earth. Thomas took all that authority and did as his Lord commanded.

May it be so with us, this day and always. May the doubting begin! Amen.