

DOUBT

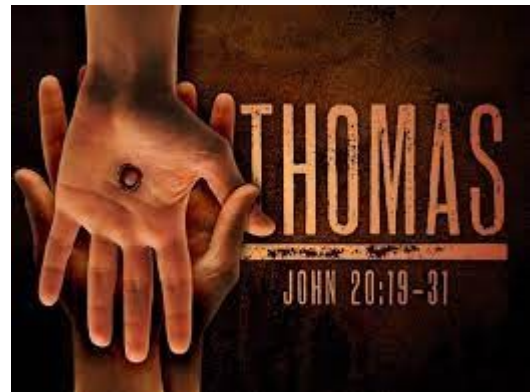
Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be ...your Moses.

Let me meet you on the water, Lord,
Just once.
It wouldn't have to be [here on the river].
Just on a puddle after [a rainfall].
And I would surely be...your Peter.

Let me meet you on the road, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to blind me.
Just [shine] a few bright lights on the way to [church]
And I would surely be...your Paul.

Let me meet you, Lord,
Just once.
Anywhere. Anytime.
Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes
Must I always be...your Thomas?

(adapted from the poem "Doubt" by Norman Shirk, Dallas Seminary 1981)



If I were to mention the names of certain disciples to you and ask you to write down the first word that comes into your mind, it is unlikely you would come up with the same words.

If I were to mention the name of Judas many of you would write down the word "betray" but not all of you.

If I were to mention Peter, some of you would write down the word ["deny"] or "faith", but not all of you.

If I were to mention the names of James and John, some of you would write down the phrase "Sons of Thunder," but not all of you. (adapted from "Touched" by Leonard Sweet, kayala.com)

But when I mention the name Thomas, the word "doubt" comes to mind for most, if not, all of us.

"Doubting Thomas."

It is interesting to note that the three synoptic Gospel writers only count Thomas as a disciple (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15), yet John not only lists him (21:2), but features Thomas in three stories.

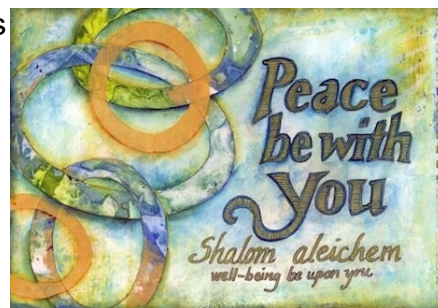
The first story featuring Thomas is when Jesus is called to heal his sick friend, Lazarus. At the time there was growing opposition to Jesus whose life was in great danger the closer he got to Jerusalem. Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (11:16).

This was "Brave" Thomas speaking.

Later, at the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be with them for only a little while longer and that where he is going they cannot come (13:33). The disciples are confused and troubled, and Thomas utters the question on their behalf. He says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5) Together these two statements reflect a disciple who is committed to following Jesus, first to death and then to places unknown. But we don't remember "Faithful" Thomas.

After the Resurrection, Jesus appears to eleven of his disciples in the Upper Room, shows them his hands and sides, and they are overjoyed.

Jesus' greeting of "Shalom, Peace be with you" was not only a traditional salutation, it was also a blessing. He breathed on them the gift of the promised Holy Spirit and instructed them to go out into the world and carry on His ministry. Shalom: "May the peace of God's love fill you with wholeness, harmony, completeness and delight."



A week goes by; perhaps the disciples are beginning to doubt. Fear and doubt. Had they really seen the Lord?

Then, Jesus makes a second appearance to the disciples who have been hiding behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews." This time Thomas is with them, and unfortunately, history has remembered Thomas for this third story.

We could remember Thomas as the "Great Confessor", but we don't because of his one moment of unbelief and those fateful words in verse 24: "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." (Thomas' stories adapted from various sources including Rev. Dr. Barb Hedges-Goetti, "Doubting Thomas", workingpreacher.org; 'Doubting' Thomas by Steve Bell, stevebell.com blog; Commentary for Easter II by Rev. Anne, St. Stephen's Church Thunder Bay)

Doubting Thomas who lived by the adage "seeing is believing" because he was skeptical, the only disciple who hadn't seen the stigmatic Jesus after his resurrection.

He didn't ask for a special revelation from Jesus; he simply asked for the same proof the other disciples had. Jesus challenged Thomas' doubt, but he did not condemn him. Rather, Jesus showed Thomas compassion and grace, knowing that Thomas really wanted to know Him, and to achieve that, he needed physical proof.

Pope Francis has spoken openly about the role of doubt in faith, that it is an essential part of faith. "Who among us – everybody, everybody! - who among us has not experienced insecurity, loss and even doubts on their journey of faith?" he told the crowd at a general audience. "Everyone! We've all experienced this, me too. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. It is part of the journey of faith; it is part of our lives." (America, September 30, 2013)

Thomas doubted. He wasn't satisfied with second-hand reports. Think of what he had experienced with Jesus. He had seen his master arrested, mistreated, beaten, and then crucified.

And what had he been doing while the other disciples were hiding behind closed doors?

Could he have been trying to pick up the broken pieces of his life and figuring out the future? Is that why he wasn't with the others and he had to see Jesus for himself?

"Let me meet you, just once."

We all come to faith in a different way. For many, it's a longing and desire for a relationship with God, taking place over many years - years of prayer, studying the Bible, coming together in worship.

Some falter for a while; and there are those who, for a long time, ignored God in their daily lives, and fell away from their faith. But, for whatever reason, they started to pray again and heard Him calling,

I heard Him. I came back fourteen years ago, and the feelings of deep peace, joy and freedom are immeasurable, knowing I have His grace.

We are blessed because we have not seen Jesus, but still believe. We may have questions and doubts, but for the most part our faith is steady and has sustained us during difficult times in our lives.

Rev. Ray Pritchard delivered an online sermon series called *If I Believe, Why Do I Doubt?* (keepbelieving.com). He states, "I have doubts and questions that I cannot answer every single day. *I don't know how a person can be a Christian and not have doubts from time to time.* Faith requires doubt in order to be faith. If you ever arrive at a place where all your doubts are gone and all your questions are answered, take a deep breath and relax because you've arrived in heaven."

Rev. Pritchard also suggests that above the front door of every church, we should erect a two-word sign that should be the church's message: **DOUBTERS WELCOME.**

If you have doubts, come inside.
If you have questions, come inside.
If you are uncertain, come inside.
If you are a skeptic, come inside.
If you are searching for truth, come inside.

Doubt is a part of faith. It's as natural as falling down learning how to ride a bike and getting back up again.

Today's Gospel builds a bridge between those who saw Jesus and those who did not: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Jesus' final words in this passage are so critical to faith. That is a blessing directed at us: we who believe in Jesus without seeing him. (Denis McBride in 'Seasons of the Word' kayala.com)

Jesus recognized that belief isn't easy or simple. If you struggle with doubt, He completely understands.

Shalom

