

“Doubting Thomas” based on John 20:19-31

Delivered by Foster Warrick on April 27, 2025, at Shelby Presbyterian Church

I want you to imagine you are told that you have won the lottery. Naturally, you get excited and begin to plan out exactly what you will spend your money on. About an hour later you receive a call that delivers the unfortunate news that a mistake was made. You didn't actually win. For three whole days you continue to imagine what your life would have been like. Then out of the blue you're informed that you actually did win. I don't know about you, but I would be quite suspicious and very confused.

Thomas was having this very feeling except on a more life altering level. Thomas, also called Didymus, was a disciple. He took part in the last supper, where he was told that his best friend and entire belief system were going to die on a cross. Additionally, he was told that one of his other very best friends were going to betray Jesus. The next day, Thomas had to witness Jesus being nailed to a cross, made fun of, and eventually killed.

So, you can imagine his shock when he was told by his closest friends that Jesus had risen. Like so many of us, Thomas then demands proof. He states that unless he sees the print of nails in Jesus' hands and can physically touch him then he won't believe. Eight days later Jesus appeared in front of Thomas and allowed him to do just that.

The definition of doubt is a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction. As humans, doubt is a common occurrence. It's how our brains are naturally wired to react. Our current society even helps to strengthen this reaction. There's constant stimulation from social media, entertainment, and culture that pulls our attention away from God. It's easy to forget His voice in all the noise.

In this story, instead of judging Thomas for his doubt, Jesus meets him in the midst of it. Doubt is not only an inevitable component of faith but can cause your faith to grow and strengthen. An example of this growth in faith is Thomas. He goes from doubting Jesus' resurrection to making the wholehearted declaration of “My Lord and my God.”

This is a pretty huge transformation considering that a few minutes prior Thomas had believed Jesus was dead. This transformation is further proof that doubt doesn't disqualify you from faith, it makes it even stronger.

I read a quote from the poet Khalil Gibran that stated that “Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.” Faith can't exist without doubt. We have to feel doubt in order to have faith. In fact, the greater your doubt is, the greater your faith can become. Looking back on a storm in your life, we can see where God was with us.

Thomas is often labeled and seemingly defined by his doubt. I think it's even what this sermon is titled in your bulletin. But Thomas didn't let his momentary doubt define him. He is said to have gone on to become a missionary and eventually was killed for his faith. Jesus died for our sins and loves us even when we have doubts. He gives us a gift called grace.

Carol Ann likes to say that your relationship with God grows the most when you step out of your comfort zone. In my opinion, this resonates with faith in general. When you are able to ask

questions and grapple with varying beliefs, that is when your faith begins to grow. God isn't afraid of your questions. He wants to become closer to you through them.

As children, faith happens seamlessly – You go to Sunday school then “big” church, maybe you even go on Wednesday nights. It's a continuous pattern. You go and they read you a bible story, at this age you don't question what they're reading it just makes sense. But as you get older, especially as you reach your teenage years and young adulthood, it starts to make less sense. You are consumed by questions about how it is possible, and you find yourself searching for rock solid proof. Then you start to question why certain things are happening right now.

God, why are so many people starving and homeless? Why did we have a worldwide pandemic, God? God- I'm having another knee surgery? Why? Why can't people just get along, God? How could you let this happen to me God? Where are you God?

These are questions people struggle with on a daily basis. Just like Thomas we crave proof. This is the time in our lives when our faith has the opportunity to grow the most. Jesus uses Thomas as a reminder that faith isn't about having every single answer. Faith is about putting your trust in God when you don't.

Throughout our childhood we are constantly surrounded by contradicting ideas and beliefs.

By one person you will be told that seeing is believing. By another you are told that needing to see for belief is ridiculous. But when you push all of these opinions aside, you are able to clearly see God's comforting words. He tells us that “Blessed are those who believe without seeing.” Believing in something unseen is treated like weakness instead of strength, but he also assures us that “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, And whose sins are covered.” Thank goodness our sins are covered.

Now I'll give you a moment to think about how you deal with doubt. I personally try to pray – have a conversation with God. This prayer doesn't have to be fancy, try talking to God like an old friend. An important part of talking to God is being honest. He can handle it.

I saw a reel from the Pope this week where he was talking about prayers. He said, “Don't pray like parrots please...instead, say it with your heart. Help me Lord, I love you Lord. When you pray, pray with your heart and not just your lips. Don't act like parrots.” Having the ability to be truly honest when we talk to God, can make the biggest difference sometimes.

Another thing to deal with our doubt is patience. We're taught to expect quick fixes and easy answers, but faith requires patience, trust, and often walking through hard things without seeing the full picture right away. Even when I can't see the full picture, I try to look for Jesus in any situation. This can provide reassurance and even answers to your questions.

Maybe you are like the woman who is sitting in a hospital waiting room, heartbroken after receiving bad news about a loved one. Instead of giving in to fear, she quietly bows her head and prays, “Jesus, be near. I don't understand this, but I trust you.” In that moment of pain, she chooses to look for Jesus—not in a physical sense, but by seeking His peace, strength, and presence in the middle of the storm

Or maybe you are like the high school student who is sitting alone at lunch, after a falling out with their friend group. They feel invisible and hurt. Instead of lashing out on social media or pretending it doesn't bother them, they silently pray, "Jesus, help me. I don't know why this is happening, but I know you're with me." Then, they notice another student sitting alone—and decide to go sit with them. In that small act, they look for Jesus by trusting Him and choosing kindness over bitterness.

Finally, we should remember that our story isn't over. We remember in Philippians 1:6 that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Just like Thomas, God is not finished with us yet. We have the opportunity to move past our doubt and not let it become our defining moment. Remember what I told you about Thomas at the beginning? He went on to be a missionary.

So if you're here today and you've got questions, or if you've felt guilty because you don't always feel super spiritual, or you wonder if your doubts disqualify you – I just want to say: You are not alone. You're human. And Jesus meets us where we are. Just like He did with Thomas.

So instead of hiding our doubt, let's bring it to Jesus— doubt isn't the enemy—it's part of the journey. What we do with our doubt can either push us away or pull us closer to Christ. And that choice is yours.

Now I know that this whole congregation is very jealous of the repeat-after-me prayers that occur often during the children's moment. So, in honor of Youth Sunday I would like to say one with you now. So, you know the drill just repeat after me:

Dear God,

As we embark on this new week and journey through life

grant us the strength to hold onto our faith

Be a constant presence

reminding us that You are always with us.

When doubt arises

let it serve as an opportunity to deepen our faith

and strengthen our bond with You.

Amen.