“No doubt”

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John 20:19-31

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***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.***

What a strange day Thomas must have had. I’m sure he talked about it many times during his lifetime – that day when Jesus, who had just died a week earlier, actually *came into the room* where Thomas and his friends were staying. Whenever Thomas told the story, people **didn’t believe him** because it sounded so impossible – just like *him*, when *he* didn’t believe the same story when his disciple friends told him the week before.

Let’s remember the setting for that amazing day Thomas experienced. The week before, Mary had gone to the tomb and discovered that Jesus’ body was gone. She ran back to tell their friends, but they **didn’t believe her**, so they ran back to the tomb – sure enough – the body was gone. Mary was super sad so she stayed at the tomb and it was then that she saw Jesus himself, and he called her by her own name! She ran back to where the disciples were hiding and said, “I have seen the Lord!” They didn’t really know what to think and **still didn’t believe** her! And then, there was more! Later that same day, Jesus actually came into the room where they were hiding, locked in because they were afraid for their lives. How did he even get into the room?! He greeted them, and even showed them the holes in his hand and his side. Then it was their turn to say "We have seen the Lord!" What happened next was the gospel of John’s version of the Pentecost events – Jesus breathed on them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and commissioned them. While the Church calendar celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit six weeks after Easter, it is refreshing to have *this* giving of the Holy Spirit early in the Easter Season. This helps us to remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit is directly connected with the events of Easter.

That was the setting. Thomas wasn’t in the room then, but they told him about everything when he got there. But Thomas told his friends, “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**.” Who knows how Jesus knew, but he knew that this was Thomas’ wish. When Jesus appeared in the room, right away 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.” This phrase has since branded poor Thomas as the one who doubted. But I think Jesus was talking to everyone in the room. Remember, none of them believed what they were told right away either. They all doubted at one point. Thomas just needed something different. Whatever we need, wherever we are, Jesus will provide the opportunity for us to meet him there.

People often remember this particular passage about Thomas as two statements. “Do not doubt but believe. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” When remembered this way, Jesus’ words can be seen to be shaming or scolding Thomas.

Often forgotten is the *impact* Jesus had on Thomas and Thomas’s confession of faith. In between “Do not doubt…” and “Blessed are those…” are these amazing words by Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” His confession of faith, and the only confession of Jesus’ divinity in the entire Gospel of John.

* Do not doubt…was meant for all of the disciples.
* My Lord and My God was the extraordinary impact of belief on one person.
* Blessed are those…was meant for everyone from then on.

After Jesus’ final ascension, no one ever had or will see Jesus again. Jesus was giving his blessing on all of us who came after that final ascension – not just Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome – but all time, including two thousand and twenty four years in the future, who have never seen Jesus, but have *come to* believe – not immediately believed – have *come to* believe.

Rather than using this text from the gospel of John to declare Thomas as the one who doubted, I like to think of Thomas as the one who first confessed his faith in Jesus as God, and set the pattern for the most basic of Christian truths. Thomas isn’t the great Doubter, he is the great Confessor in this gospel.

Secondly, out of context then, this text is often mis-remembered in order to say that doubting is bad, believing without seeing is good. This is what happens when our faith is hijacked to support harmful ideas. This false dichotomy between doubt/belief bad/good is one that harmful media and power seekers count on. Their message counts on us thinking that the Bible says doubt is bad. That way we won’t doubt them. The Bible says having faith means believing without proof. That way they don’t have to have logical arguments based on reliable data. Having faith *in God* often means not knowing but believing. But having faith in people who are *not* about helping one another, *not* about loving their neighbors, and *not* about seeking justice and loving mercy is *not* Biblical. Healthy skepticism and critical thinking are crucial. Healthy skepticism and critical thinking are essential to being part of a healthy society.

This is something we all understand as important during this time when our country is so divided, and when countries around the world are starting to see more and more autonomous dictatorial leaders come to power.

What we have come to believe along our spiritual journey of engagement with God is not something to be ignored when we find ourselves caught up in the hardness of the world. Our spiritual journey, what we have come to believe, is central to living through the hardness of the world.

Our faith helps us take a stand against injustices. Our faith helps us take a stand in favor of inclusion, love, acceptance, justice, kindness, humility, and mercy. Of that, there is no doubt.

Let us pray…