

*BELIEVING* Thomas  
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John 20:19-31

Have you ever missed a meeting – and found out later, you were ‘volunteered-to-do’  
a certain task?

A friend of mine named Dave is a pastor in Raleigh-Durham area.

Happened to him recently,

We were talking over Holy week when he said –

I made the mistake of skipping the last ministerium meeting

When all the local pastors get together for a program and Bible study.

And wouldn't you know it – guess who they assigned responsibilities for the community Easter

**Sunrise** service!???

– Thomas missed the meeting.

A REALLY IMPORTANT MEETING!

He missed the Lord's 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection appearance to the disciples

When they were in the upper room – he was not

For what reason we do not know,

He missed the meeting, wasn't assigned a task

But he did take on the task of being skeptical –

of wanting to see for himself whether

These reports about Jesus being alive again were true...

And because of that skepticism, he has been forever known as \_\_\_\_\_ Thomas.

[fill in the blank!!!! Yes, "doubting" Thomas]

But that is only half the truth, as we shall see...

Have any of you ever played a card game called "I Doubt It"? You probably know it as "your bluffing," or "BULL" or by a more dubious name, but the goal is to be the first player to get rid of all of his or her cards. All the cards are dealt out to the players. The first contestant lays down several cards and announces "two aces", if nobody doubts, the second lays down a card announces "one deuce", and on up the scale. Before long, someone will say "I doubt it". If the player had announced "3 sevens", the last 3 cards would be exposed. If they turn out to be 3 sevens, then the challenger will have to put the whole pile in his hand. If they were not 3 sevens, then the player who lied picks up the pile.

You can play this game and never doubt anyone, but you will almost always lose. Or you can voice your doubts too frequently and also lose.

**The trick is to know when to raise your doubts, and when to let go of them.**

Thomas knew when to ask questions, he wanted to see for himself...

But he also knew, in the presence of the Risen Christ

How to let go of his doubts as he exclaimed...

– My Lord and My God.

We too learn to ask the questions

We too must not try to keep our doubts at arms length

But embrace them...

To have a sense of reverence for the questions...

I remember spending some time at George Mason University – Fairfax VA

Trying to start up a Lutheran campus ministry . One day – we set up a kiosk in the student center –

Handed out packets of free stuff – which included purple and orange highlighters, postit notes and snickers bars...

Our goal was to try and get students to sign up for Lutheran campus ministry.

Some were surprised Lutherans on campus

Others didn't know what Lutherans were

And one student really interesting interaction

As he approached me – I was about to ask if wanted some free stuff he beat me to and said:

I ONLY want the free stuff, I'm not going to sign up though

I am a Sunni Muslim...

I smiled and handed him a packet – "God's grace is free, so are the snickers bars! Here you go..."

He turned to go, but hesitated a moment,

and then turned back, can I ask you some questions?

Certainly.

He then began to rapid fire questions about theology and church history...questions like:

What caused the first split in the church between the Roman Catholics and the orthodox Christians...

What kind of worship do Lutherans do?

What do you think about authority of the pope nowadays?

Why do protestants not include the apocryphal books in their Bible while the Catholics do???

It was as if I was taking an oral exam back at seminary!!!

I could sense that the other folks who were with me handing out packets were leaning forward, straining to see how I would respond

Now I would like to say there was a great conversion that day, but alas, there was not,

But there was good conversation!

It turns out that he was raised in Richmond, and although a Sunni Muslim, he attended catholic schools all through high school...

Such curiosity...

I sensed in him as much reverence for the question – as for the answer –

Perhaps that is what we can learn from Thomas as well....

As he brings his questions – or what are called doubts

Before the disciples...

Thomas knew when to ask questions. If there was ever a time to ask some serious questions, it was after the death of Jesus. The other disciples had reported that they had seen Jesus. But Thomas was convinced that Jesus was dead and gone. That, that chapter of his life was over

Unless he could touch Jesus' scars, he would remain doubtful.

Like many of us, Thomas needed proof. He wanted things to be concrete and tangible. Thomas did not believe in fairy tales or fantasy... What an encouraging word to those of us who have moments of hesitation, or times when the "Alleluias" get stuck in your throat. After all, blind faith that has not been tested can be meaningless, but faith built on honest searching can be a very solid, lasting faith.

We need not cringe at the thought of doubt.

doubt does not mean , your whole system may crumble like a house of cards.

The one thing Thomas did in the midst of doubts, was - he kept showing up.

He wasn't with the disciples that first week, but he was there the next.

When you feel like you don't have a faithful bone in your body, that is when you most need to be in these pews! For it is here, that you need to hear the voice of your neighbor singing out the resurrection on your behalf. It is in the family of faith where we carry each other's faith through periods of doubt.

How good it can be to admit our doubts and to find company in each of them.

And quite frequently it is in sharing our doubts with a kindred spirit,

that we all become stronger in our faith and less afraid of our doubts....

### **We learn to doubt our doubts...**

To put our doubts to the test...

Just because we don't fully comprehend something – doesn't mean we can't enjoy it!!!

After all who can comprehend the empty tomb, or a resurrected body which passes through doors?

But that doesn't mean you aren't invited to be a part of this mysterious reality.

Take for example the following...

I can't understand completely the perfect curl of a wave as it surges in straight line toward the shore – but that doesn't stop me from getting into the water and feeling the rush and thrill of catching that wave as a body surfer...

Or I can't explain how blackberries grow from a seed to vine – to become a rich luxurious colored dark hues – bursting with juice...

but that doesn't stop me from enjoying them in my vanilla ice cream!!

I don't know how vibrations made with the mouth and lips can be transformed into the melodious sounds of an oboe concerto – but I can fully appreciate it – and take it in...and revel in it

And give thanks for it...

so too – I am not overly concerned with how God created the world,

or parted the sea – or emptied the tomb...

I am more eager to enjoy it than explain it...

To offer praise than to critically dissect

Certainly we take our doubts and questions seriously

But they don't need to prohibit us from entering into the joy of the creation

And the love of the creator...

Christian author Fred Beuchner once said:

*If you don't have any doubts, you are kidding yourself or asleep...Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep faith awake and moving.*

Similar thought reflected in Emily Dickinson, American poet:

we both believe and disbelieve a hundred times an hour, which keeps believing nimble.

I like that – a faith that is nimble – as opposed to stagnant or self-righteous...

Ants in the pants of faith... what an image!

Do you remember the commercial – several years ago – couple at park – blanket for a romantic lunch – ants in his pants – starts moving around – girlfriend thinks he’s dancing – keeps moving so vigorously – that a crowd gathers and encourages him to keep dancing...

As God's Easter people - We are wide awake and we are in motion.

Ants in the pants of faith. Maybe that’s what Doubting Thomas had. We do not know for sure what happened to Thomas, but the legend is so pervasive that it is probably true. Thomas was said to have really moved. He made the long journey to South India where he introduced Christianity to that sub-continent. He is said to have been martyred India, and there is a first century stone cross outside the city of Madras which marked Thomas’ grave.

When Portuguese colonialists arrived in South India 1500 years later, what did they find? They found thousands of Christians... they found the legend of how Thomas had evangelized the whole nation, and they found the stone cross. It took a lot of ants to move Thomas that far and that fast.

But that’s what faith with room for questions and doubt can do.

Thomas represents a healthy faith life - one which is not self-certain, stagnant, arrogant and dull ...

But faith that is dynamic, interesting and lively.

So, I guess I have to say it - Bring on the ants.

Let us pray...

Lord in the midst of many doubts, uncertainties and unknowns, we turn again to you. Grant us the courage to doubt, grant us the courage to trust, grant us the courage to doubt our doubts, and help us to know that in all our seeking and searching you are there with arms outstretched in love. Above all,

remind us that our hope is not in right answers, or right belief or right behavior, but in You and Your gracious presence.

And now to him who is able to accomplish abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory, now and forever. Amen.