

## “It Is Okay To Question Your Faith”

John 20:19-31

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When I was a college student, I wasn't sure about Jesus' resurrection. I mean that I believe in God and say to people that Jesus is my Savior, but I had a question, “How could a dead body come alive?” I thought that it must be that he was either not completely dead or it was fake. Well, I was a man of questions and doubts. I had a lot of questions about faith not because I didn't trust God's almighty power, but I wanted to have clarity of my faith.

Today's Scripture reading talks about Thomas who had questions and doubts pertaining to the risen Jesus Christ. Not because of his disbelief, but because he had to “see it to believe it.” In Church history, he has been known well as “the doubter.” “The doubter” sounds like a disgraceful nickname for him. **Have you considered this yourselves, like Thomas who doubts and wants to double check, before you accept it?** I believe God still speaks to us even through Thomas' honest question and doubt.

Some of you regard him as the doubter, a man of lack of faith, but I feel for him as another side of my faith. Thomas as one of the disciples wanted to make sure that what he was experiencing with the risen Christ was real, and a more solid living proof for his faith. What is happening in front of him is an unbelievable and incredible situation. How can any of the other disciples take this event in a simplistic way? Thomas must thoroughly accept what he believes. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, the disciples had seen the risen Christ. The disciples rejoiced when they saw Christ. They accepted Jesus the risen one without any doubt, but Thomas was different. When the other disciples told him that they have seen the Lord, he wouldn't believe it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Do not doubt, but believe’

Thomas was one of the disciples who followed Jesus with all his heart and mind as his Messiah. Imagine his feeling when he heard that his Messiah was killed on a cross in a defenseless way. He must have dealt with betrayed feelings, frustration within himself or feelings of abandonment, “being left alone”. Doubt comes to us when we can't be absolutely positive what is going to happen. This kind of emotion has something to do with fear, deep despair and disappointment in failing to fulfill our expectations. If these feelings came to him as hurt with a wounded heart, it could be a natural reaction and make sense for us to understand Thomas' reaction. Even I would ask or doubt Jesus' death to make

sure he is the risen Lord that he trusted.

In the four Gospels, each Gospel, Mark, Matthew and Luke talks about Thomas as one of the twelve disciples. But in the Gospel of John only, he is described as a negative image of disciples. Dr. Elaine Pagels (who teaches early Christian history at Princeton University) gives us another intriguing insight that the Gospel of John was written as a critique of the Gospel of Thomas. She assumes that there were two rival Christian communities in early Christianity: Apostle Thomas' faith community and Apostle John's faith community. They rallied around each other because of their different approach to Jesus Christ's teachings. Among the four Gospels on Jesus Christ, only John describes Thomas as "the doubter"—the one who failed to understand who Jesus was. John then tells how the risen Jesus personally appeared to Thomas in order to rebuke him. This might be a reason why we have been thinking of Thomas as "the doubter" or "faithless" disciple. We don't want to underestimate Thomas' confession to the risen Jesus in today's reading. In verse 26, it says, a week later, when Thomas was with other disciples, Jesus appeared to Thomas and said to him. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."<sup>28</sup> **Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"** From the eyes of John, we should not doubt, but believe only. But each of us has a different type of faith like either Apostle John or Apostle Thomas.

Even among us here, we might have different perspectives and approaches to faith and the risen Christ. Thomas, as a faithful disciple, had a different approach and understanding toward the risen Christ. What does it mean that Thomas touches Jesus' hands where the nail marks were and put his hands in Jesus' side wounds? Who wounded Jesus? Jesus Christ, Son of God was hung on the cross and died because of the heavy weight of the brokenness in us. Thomas realized his brokenness when he touched Jesus' wounds. That moment made him turn around and confess, "My Lord, my God. You died for me as a son of God. I come to believe by touching your real pain and wounds." The risen Christ was willing to help Thomas' unbelief.

Ironically, the doubt that Thomas had was not about Jesus. It was about himself. Thomas doubted Jesus and did not open himself up to Jesus, because he wasn't sure what was happening to him. When he realized that Jesus brought peace with a forgiving spirit, he confessed that Jesus was his Lord and God. Thomas might have expected condemnation, but Jesus brought forgiveness and love for him. While the disciples abandoned him and turned away from him, Jesus never abandoned them. Rather he appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you." When Jesus said, "peace be with you" he meant that we should not

doubt. We should believe!! We should not worry about us, God accepts us no matter what we do and no matter what we've done. God loves us as we are. God is willing to come to all of us and turn our doubt to faith, and despair to joy. Jesus Christ embraced Thomas' doubt and uncertain heart. Whoever you are either doubter, questioner, seeker or one of deep faith, God comes to you as the risen One.

Who are we among the disciples? Do you identify yourself with John or Thomas? It doesn't matter to God. Jesus Christ invites all of us to hear or see him or touch his wounds to believe in him as the One who died for us. In this season of Easter, it is my hope that you will find and receive the healing power for the broken pieces in our lives, in this society and in this world. **Christ is risen, He has risen indeed for all of us! Amen.**