

## **“Faith and Doubt”**

April 12, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture text: John 20:19-31

Some of you have this morning’s Scripture lesson pretty well memorized for it comes up every year on the Sunday after Easter. It begins with the story of that first Easter evening, when the disciples are gathered behind locked doors out of fear. The powers-that-be just had Jesus arrested and crucified on made-up charges, and it was a safe assumption the disciples were next. But in the midst of their fear and hiding, Jesus shows up, greets them with peace, and shows them His hands and His side to help them believe it is actually Him, risen from the grave. But Thomas, one of the disciples, was not with them when Jesus came. They told him about it, but without actually being there and experiencing it, he couldn’t believe it. After all, people don’t come back from the dead and walk through locked doors and yet still have a physical body others could see and touch. That is not the way biology or physics works. Thomas said, “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.” With that statement, Thomas picked up the nickname “Doubting Thomas”. I want to talk a little bit about doubt this morning.

To begin with, Thomas did not invent doubt. Adam and Eve doubted God’s word in the Garden of Eden. Abraham confronted God with his doubt that God was ever going to fulfill God’s promise of a child. Moses doubted God could use him to free God’s people from slavery in Egypt. Even John the Baptist, who Jesus called the greatest human ever born, sent disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3,11). I appreciate that the Bible doesn’t whitewash its heroes and only show their moments of glory, but rather shares that “the greatest born of a woman” and two of the biggest mountains of faith in the Old Testament had times of doubt. Even after Jesus is raised from the dead and shows Himself to His followers, doubt invades those Easter moments. Not only here with Thomas in the gospel of John, but Matthew, Mark and Luke include doubters. When Jesus reveals Himself on Easter in Luke’s gospel, it says, “He showed them His hands and His feet. Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving.” (24:40-41) Matthew says, “When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them... Go and make disciples of all nations.” (28:17-18) I guess what I am saying is doubt is not the opposite of faith. It can be a part of it. The opposite of faith in Jesus, is having faith in something else. Doubt is part of the journey of faith and has been since the father of faith.

Notice, Jesus did not condemn Thomas for doubting. Jesus does not stop the worship in Matthew 24 to separate the doubters from the believers and only allow the full believers to stay. He commissioned doubters along with the others to “Go and make disciples”. Having

doubts about Jesus, about resurrection, about what Jesus calls us to do – it is okay. It is not necessarily a sign of weakness or the devil working his way in. What it is, is an invitation.

I say it is an invitation because look at what all those doubters did next – they stayed. Thomas stayed with the disciples. Neither he nor they kick him out. The disciples in Matthew still worshipped and received the commissioning, even in their doubts. Abraham and Moses brought their doubts to God, then stayed with God. Doubting is not an invitation to leave. It is an invitation to stay. Stay in the community of faith. Stay in the place God can touch you.

You see, God knows doubt sneaks up on us. It sneaks in from our intellectual side. “How can God be good when there is so much suffering?” “Where is the physical proof of God’s existence that would stand up in court?” Sometimes doubt is more emotionally based. It can be triggered by personal experiences, such as unanswered prayers, betrayal, loss, or deep disappointment. “If God loves me, why did He allow this to happen?” “Why do I feel so distant from Him?” Sometimes doubt festers in a matter of the will. “What I am thinking and feeling is very different from what God says. Can I really trust 2000-year-old writings to guide my life today?” Sometimes doubt arises out of our experiences, or lack thereof, like: “Why did miracles only happen back then” and “I asked for a sign and got nothing.” For me those doubts came to a head while I was in seminary, studying to become a pastor. That is when I started to realize the entire Bible doesn’t perfectly align with itself, and there are some really nasty parts of it. Intellectual doubt. I felt betrayed because the God I thought I knew was so much smaller than the one I was learning about. Emotional doubt. I didn’t know if this bigger understanding of God was one I wanted to give my life’s work to. Doubt of the will. And why was God so quiet when I needed God to be really loud? Experiential doubt. Doubt was coming from every angle, but I accepted doubt’s invitation to stay. I poured myself into school and conversations with faculty and fellow students. I was working through my doubts when a member of the congregation I was serving died, and I had to preach their funeral. It was in writing and preaching that funeral that I realized I really did believe what I was saying about resurrection and new life. I still wasn’t sure about all the details, but I knew the core was true. I am still not clear on all the secondary issues from exactly how God created the earth to the timing and way Jesus is coming back. But I have learned not to let secondary questions cloud the primary truth – Jesus brings peace, forgiveness, purpose, new life and eternal life. Without Him, I don’t have any of that. Doubt is an invitation to stay – stay in the community, stay in the Scriptures, stay where God can touch you.

The story of Thomas and his doubt helps us with 2 things. First, if we stay in the community of faith, even in the midst of our doubts, Jesus will meet us. For whatever reason, Thomas was not with the other disciples that first Easter evening when Jesus showed up. He was not in the community of faith but was going it alone. And he missed Jesus. Then he returned to the community, and Jesus came for him. Now Jesus is not going to walk through one of our walls today and show us His crucifixion scars. After 40 days of resurrection appearances, Jesus

ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. But if you accept doubt's invitation to stay, Jesus will meet you where you are in your journey. Jesus will come to you.

And that encounter will never be a guilt-ridden event. Jesus came to Thomas just like He came to the others, with "Peace be with you". Not shame, not guilt, not hurt; but peace. Stay in the community. Stay where Jesus can touch you. Doubt makes us want to turn away. But there is nothing out there to turn to. As Peter said in John 6 when Jesus' teachings were getting tough and people started to leave, and Jesus asked, "are you leaving too?" "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Turning away in our doubt is tempting, and turning away is easy, but what are you going to turn to? Criticizing is easy, but what better option is offered? "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Apply the same doubts to your doubts that you apply to your faith. Stay and Jesus will come.

The second thing we learn from Thomas' story is we can get over ourselves and get out of the way. Remember Thomas' big boast to the disciples? As they were telling him about Jesus appearing to them, he said, "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." Yet when Jesus came to Thomas and invited him to see His hands and side – to put his fingers in the marks of the nails and the spear; Thomas simply proclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" It doesn't say he touched Jesus at all. There is no report of Thomas actually putting his finger in the marks on Jesus' hands and side. There are times the heat of the moment consumes us and we say things like, "God, if you don't heal my mother, I will never speak to You again." Or "If you are real, make this person love me." Or "God, I will believe in You if you help me get pregnant," or "make sure I am not pregnant," or "help me win the championship," or "get me this job", or "make this pain", "this cancer", "this person", "this situation disappear." Thomas found he didn't need the creator and redeemer of the whole universe to jump through Thomas' little hoops in order to see and respond to what was right in front of him. "My Lord and my God." The first time in the Gospel of John anybody recognized Jesus as God – not just the Son of God, but God in the flesh. Jesus is not going to jump through all your little hoops, but He will come.

Doubt is an invitation to stay. Abraham stayed with the God who promised him descendants, and Issac was born. Moses stayed with the God who called him to help set God's people free. The road was not easy, but Moses not only helped free them from slavery in Egypt, but helped form them into the people of God. Even after his public announcement of his doubt, Thomas stayed with the disciples, and when Jesus came, Thomas speaks the climax of the Gospel of John, "my Lord and my God". Doubt is an invitation to stay and open yourself to the God of life.

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