



Jesus of Locked Doors

John 20:19-31

April 12, 2015

Those of you who have grown up in the church, you know the story. Doubting Thomas: the disciple who didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, and said he wouldn't believe until he could put his hand into the scars of Jesus. Therefore, he is forever known as doubting Thomas.

Don't you hate it when you make one mistake and it defines you from then on out?

Here is a silly example. One day I went shopping. I found this great dress for \$100. I also found a great purse to go with it for \$200. I needed the dress for a special occasion, but I did not need the purse. But I really wanted that purse. By using a certain rational, which we women do when we go shopping, I bought both the dress and the purse. I wore the dress once and never wore it again. But the purse I used on a regular basis for years.

Which was the better deal? By the way, the two purchased items are hypothetical, but the following rational is true. That dress cost \$100 for one wearing. But the purse ended up costing pennies per use and therefore, the better deal. Are you following me?

I was so excited about this rational that I shared this with 2 girlfriends who burst out laughing, and from then on I became the brunt of many jokes. And my friend said, "Diane, you will never live this one down." They remind me of it every time I visit them and we go shopping.

Thomas has never lived down being the disciple who doubted. Today, we are going to rehabilitate doubting Thomas.

Turn to scripture passage in our bulletin. This is the perfect text for the Sunday after Easter because the main action of this story takes place exactly one week after that first Easter.

As we prepare to hear God's word, pray with me: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read John 20:19-31

The door is locked. It is the night of the resurrection, and the disciples are hiding in a locked room. I am kind of expecting them to be celebrating just a bit because they heard about the Resurrection. Instead, we find them huddled behind locked doors for *fear of the Jews*. They are afraid for their own lives and their uncertain futures. So, I can understand that.

But I wonder...are they also afraid of Jesus? The women told them Jesus was alive. Perhaps they are thinking about how they had failed Jesus. All had run away except for John. Peter had denied him 3 times. Maybe the last person they wanted to meet was Jesus risen from the dead to confront their failures.

The door is locked...and it doesn't stop Jesus. Jesus, who earlier said he was the door or gate of his sheep (John 10:7) comes right through those locked doors and appears in the middle of his frightened sheep. Peace be with you. No confrontation, no anger, no rebukes... just joy and peace and Jesus' understanding.

For some reason, Thomas was not there. We don't why. The passage doesn't say. And he doesn't believe the disciples when they tell him Jesus is alive and appeared to them.

The thing you need to realize is that Thomas was not the first to doubt. When Jesus appears to Mary after the Resurrection she runs back to tell the disciples. In the Gospel of Luke, it says the disciples didn't believe the women because they

thought the women were talking nonsense. They needed to see Jesus for themselves, just like Thomas wanted to see Jesus for himself.

The disciples needed proof. And they got it. Thomas just wanted what the disciples had experienced already...to see Jesus.

Here's the thing: God's most faithful servants in scripture are often the most doubtful. That's good news, isn't it?

Abraham was incredulous and Sarah hysterical with doubt when God promised them a son in their old age. Jonah's faith was so doubt-infested that he tried to run away from the mission God gave him. Moses doubted he could lead. The prophet, Habakkuk, doubted God's justice. Elijah doubted whether God knew what he was doing.

And then there were the disciples: they were constantly doubting. When Jesus was peacefully sleeping through a storm at sea, they panicked and screamed at Jesus, "Don't you care?" even though they had witnessed over and over again the miraculous powers of Jesus.

Even Jesus: fully divine AND fully human. In the Garden, Matthew says Jesus was so overwhelmed with sorrow that he asked God if there was any other way instead of the cross. In Luke, it says that he was in such anguish that sweat like drops of blood poured off of him. An angel had to come and strengthen him. I wonder if there were doubts.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). I had a seminary professor who said when God placed all our sins on Jesus while on the cross (Isaiah 53:6), God turned his back on Jesus, and this took Jesus by surprise. For the first time in his life, Jesus was separated from God and cried out, "Why?" Can you imagine the doubts?

So why blame only Thomas for doubt? Then again, he may have had a good reason to doubt. The disciples told Thomas all that Jesus said to them. "I am sending you out" and breathed the Holy Spirit on them.

Eight days go by, and they are still behind locked doors. What happened to being “sent out”? Perhaps Thomas doesn’t doubt Jesus. He doubts the disciples who haven’t started to do anything different since first encountering the risen Christ. Shouldn’t contact with the risen Christ change you? Do we show evidence of a risen Christ in our lives? The disciples showed no evidence. No wonder Thomas doubted.

All Thomas was asking is nothing more than what the others had already received: to see Jesus, wounds and all. The wonder of it all is that Jesus shows up again one week later to provide exactly what Thomas needs. And, the disciples are still hiding behind locked doors. Apparently, it is not only Thomas that needs reassuring that Jesus has conquered death.

And wonder of wonders, Thomas is the one who responds with the highest confession of anyone in John’s Gospel: “My Lord and my God!”

I want to take a closer look at those locked doors. When Jesus came into the room, the text literally reads “The Jesus of locked doors/gates came stood into the middle of them.” Remember the famous painting of Jesus standing outside of an old wooden door of a house in a garden, and he is knocking. There is no doorknob on the outside of the door, suggesting that Jesus cannot come in unless the person on the inside opens the door.

Well, I hate to say this but I don’t think Jesus is always that polite. Our story today shows that the Resurrected Jesus can come through any door, whether open or locked.

The Jesus of locked doors did not rebuke Thomas or any of the other disciples. The Jesus of locked doors came in the midst of their fear, pain, doubt, and confusion. He came speaking peace, breathing into their anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit. Peace.

The risen Jesus of locked doors comes to us in our doubts and fears and confusions, opens our locked doors, and speaks peace, and breathes the breath of the Holy Spirit into our anxious lives. And no, we do not have the proof that the disciples had of a Risen Jesus. (Don't you wish we could have a little more?) But Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John was writing to Christians who had not physically seen Jesus like the disciples. Jesus had already ascended. And, John says at the end of our passage: I have not told you everything. I couldn't fit it all in. But what I have given you is enough. Read it and believe. Don't doubt.

There are many reasons for doubting in our lives today:

When the Bible and our faith are hard to understand.

When things happen when we think they shouldn't, such as the news this week, and we wonder why God allows it to happen.

When things don't happen that we think should happen, such as the healing of a loved one, and God doesn't do it.

When we are in pain, whether emotional or physical, and we wonder why God doesn't take it away.

And the doubts creep in.

You will notice there is a little bit of room underneath our scripture passage to take notes. I didn't leave much room, did I? In that space I invite you to write a doubt about your faith, or about God, or about Jesus, or our world. You can write it now, or wait until you get home.

As you do this, here are some thoughts that I want you to remember and take home with you:

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is part of faith. What we need to do is learn how to live with that doubt and still find a way to believe.

Remember, that faith is a belief held in the presence of doubt. Faith does not remove all doubt.

Do not suppress or repress honest doubts. Thomas taught us that; he was willing to voice them. Doubts may not always lead to answers, but they will lead to growth. "My Lord and my God!"

There is room for doubts in this place. All we ask is that you keep coming, continue worshiping, continue praying, so the Jesus of locked doors can open your heart and deepen your faith as you stay in community.

May God uphold you in your doubts. God bless you in your faith. In your doubts, God sends you out just as he did the disciples who did not fully understand everything. But we are the Resurrection people who bring the hope of Christ to all we encounter....even in our doubts.

Amen and amen.

Charge

Jesus cannot be stopped by our locked doors: our fears, our doubts, our anxieties. The Jesus of Locked Doors blesses our faith, bears our doubts, and uses people like us to make a difference in this world God loves so much. "I am sending you," Jesus says.

Blessing

Now may the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy as you trust in him, so that you will overflow with hope because of the Resurrection. Amen.

