



A Door to Discovery



<John 20:19-31>

¹⁹ It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

²⁴ Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

²⁶ After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!"

²⁸ Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don't see and yet believe."

³⁰ Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. ³¹ But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.



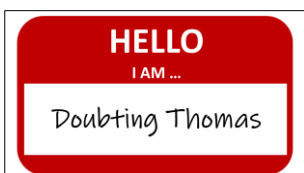
Last Sunday, we talked about *Hope Unlocked*, and how Easter reminds us that the resurrected Christ brings hope and joy to us even when we find ourselves behind the closed doors of fear and hopelessness. We talked about how Jesus came to Mary in the darkness and to the disciples in a locked room. Jesus will step into the darkness and through our locked doors and meet us there unlocking the doors of our hearts and bringing us hope. Today we are reminded that the resurrected Christ brings hope and peace to us even when we find ourselves full of doubt.



*What do we call Thomas? What nickname do we give him? Doubting Thomas! I think Thomas gets a bit of a bad rap here. Labels have a habit of sticking, and then people think they are true. *Have you ever got stuck with a label you wish you could lose?**



Think about the disciple Peter for a moment. What did he do? He's the one who walks out on the water and sinks. The one who doesn't want his feet washed. He denied Jesus 3 times before the cockerel crowed. Last week we heard how he peeped in the tomb and ran away. And now at the beginning of today's scripture he is waiting scared in the upper room not believing the story of the women until he changes his mind when Jesus appears. And then in John 21, Jesus appears to Peter again, and Jesus forgives him and offers redemption. *What do we call Peter? The Rock.* "You are the rock on which I will build my church." *And that is a good and an appropriate label and its okay that it stuck, rather than focusing on his shortcomings.*



Now we have Thomas who is stuck with this derisive nickname *Doubting Thomas*. What do we know about Thomas? Thomas was one of the 12 who left everything to follow Jesus. Thomas, who is the one Jesus is talking to when Jesus says "I am the way and the truth and the life" happily answering a question that Thomas had inquisitively asked him. Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus got word that Lazarus had died, and when Jesus said I am going to go to Judea and the others said it was too dangerous. It was Thomas who urged them all to go with Jesus displaying courage and bravery as the others baulked. And it was Thomas who for some reason was missing when Jesus appeared to the others in the locked room.

We don't know why Thomas was missing. Maybe he was not as frightened as the others. Or maybe he was the essential worker who despite his fears had to keep on working or the volunteer doing the shopping for those unable to go out.

We don't know why Jesus appeared to the other disciples, and then waited a whole week before Thomas could see him. Think about that week. How do you think Thomas felt to be left out? Can you imagine his hurt that his friend had come and missed out visiting with him? Can you sense his pain as he wonders what's wrong with him? What did he do to be excluded? Can you imagine what it is like to be in a room of people bragging and teasing him as deep down he longs for what they have? *Have you ever been there?*

Can you feel his agonizing as he lives and wrestles with his doubts? That sticking around took faith. Thomas was both inquisitive and courageous, but he was faithful and faith-filled and yet we lump him permanently with the label doubting.



And when Jesus did appear to Thomas he said: "*Hi Doubting Thomas. Looks like I'm right and you are wrong. Your beliefs are wrong. Shame on you.*"¹ **No!** That's not what Jesus did! Jesus says, "Reach your finger here, Thomas. Look at my hands; reach your hand here and put it in my side." And Thomas, given the chance to see Jesus, discovers the answers to his questions and cries out, "My Lord and my God!"

We can learn from Thomas that it is okay to have questions. Jesus was ok with having him wrestle with his doubts for a whole week before he appeared to help him out. Jesus didn't criticize Thomas. Jesus appeared and enabled Thomas to discover the answers to his doubt. **Thomas grew through the experience.** He had a moment of revelation, of **discovery**. His faith became more authentic as it enabled him to come to a new recognition of who Jesus was.

¹ <http://chadholtz.net/2011/04/22/peace-be-with-you-an-easter-sermon/>. (Accessed May 2011).

If the gospel writer John thought this story was embarrassing then he could have left this story out, but he included it and by doing so, I think John is saying that our doubts and our questions are okay, they are a part of our faith and our journey of **discovery**. Asking questions is NOT showing unfaithfulness. We can still trust and give our hearts to God and live transformed lives and have questions. It is in the questions, that we explore the mystery, and make new **discoveries**.



Theologian Paul Tillich says, "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."² And Christian author Phillip Yancey says, "Doubt is the skeleton on which the flesh of faith attaches itself."³

As I was thinking about what to title this sermon, I came across a prayer from the Church of Scotland that said: ***Teach me, not so much to fear doubt as to see it as a sign of the mystery of life and a door to discovery.***⁴



And it is that thought of ***A Door to Discovery*** that led to the title and the picture for today's sermon. *I'll say it again: **Teach me, not so much to fear doubt as to see it as a sign of the mystery of life and a door to discovery.***

Closing our doors does not have to be seen as negative. Closing the door on the world is sometimes necessary, like when we are ill, or when we need to recharge, or to keep ourselves self from danger. Jesus will meet us behind those closed doors. He comes offering us Peace. And with a willingness to show us his wounds and engage our doubts and questions.

May this time of being behind closed doors, be a time of mystery, of growth, of faith, of **discovery**. Embrace your doubts. **It is the doubts themselves that are a door to discovery. Let's dream together of a future that looks more like the Kingdom of God.**



Sonya Renee Taylor, author, poet, and social justice activist, said this, which is on a meme doing the rounds. *[If you have seen it attributed to Brené Brown, she says that it was not her quote.]* ***We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequality, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.***

Together, let's embrace our doubts, so that we too can honestly cry out, "My Lord, and my God" **and then dare to explore a better future.**

Legend has it that, strong in his faith, Thomas travelled to India in AD52 where he established seven churches. Twenty years later he was martyred for his faith.⁶ That's **daring belief**, and faith in action.

May we dare to believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, we will have life in his name. May we dare to believe in the things we cannot see: in Christ's love for us and in his peace breathed out upon us. May we dare to believe that another world is possible, that suffering

² https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/paul_tillich_383200

³ As quoted by: <http://chadholtz.net/2011/04/22/peace-be-with-you-an-easter-sermon/>. (Accessed May 2011).

⁴ From *More than Words*, copyright Saint Andrew Press 2008. Posted on the Church of Scotland's *Starters for Sunday* website. As quoted by: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/04/prayer-of-reflection-doubt.html>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/BreneBrown/status/1250818370825596930>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle#Mission_in_India

can end, that we can play a part in the kingdom to come. May we dare to believe in heaven on earth, in the light breaking through, in justice made new.⁷



May we dare to not hide from our doubts, but recognize them as a **door to mystery and to discovery and to deeper faith.**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Amen.

⁷ Adapted from the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/> as quoted by <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/03/prayer-daring-to-believe.html>