

John 20:19-29  
“Blessing Amid Doubts”  
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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA  
Second Sunday of Easter, April 24, 2022

*The Reading: John 20:19-29*

*<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the religious authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

*<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”*

*<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “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!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

In one of his greatest hits, the rock musician, Sting, sings about losing faith: “You could say I lost my faith in science and progress. You could say I lost my belief in the holy Church. You could say I lost my sense of direction. You could say all of this and worse, but if I ever lose my faith in you, there'd be nothing left for me to do!”

**Thomas was a smart, idealistic, and sensitive person, who was losing faith after the traumatic experience of Jesus’ crucifixion.** Think about it. Like Sting, Thomas had lost faith in the religion of his upbringing and its leaders. He also didn’t have any confidence in the system of governance. Thomas couldn’t have thought any longer that society was going to get better. The violence, the greed, and the abuse of power was so well engrained and installed. In *our* time, too, right? It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that Thomas was even questioning Jesus’ good news of the Reign of God. After all, he could’ve sighed: “No one follows God’s lead! There’s nothing left for me to do!”

And, now, in the passage we have read this morning, it is a week after the Sunday of the resurrection. We find Thomas plagued by *additional* doubts.

He doubted the word of his fellow disciples and friends. He didn't find Mary's story of the tomb to be plausible, nor did he take his friends at *their* word about seeing Jesus, men with whom he had shared at least three intense years! On top of all these doubts, Thomas probably doubted *himself*. I hear him musing, "If what they are saying is true, and I go down that road again; if I pick up where we left off with Jesus, what will happen? If I invest and pour myself into that relationship and into God's work in this world, I might fail miserably, *again!*" **It seems to me that Thomas was afraid to believe. In fact, he angrily refused to.**

The same thing can happen to us. We are not immune to losing faith, of being afraid to believe, and being angry that we feel this way! Doubts come with being human in this world, even for well-seasoned Christians. For instance, I listened to a recording of an address by Pope Francis from 2016. In it, he admitted that *he* has doubts, "many of them." He goes on to assert that doubts, framed positively, can actually signal our desire to know God.<sup>1</sup>

I think that this may have been the case for Thomas. To his credit, he wanted a genuine relationship with God and a truth worth dying and living for. He desired to be close, even when he pushed those that loved him away. **Amid his doubts, the resurrected Jesus came to him**, showed him his wounds, and Thomas fell on his knees in utter devotion: "My Lord and my God!"

**You and I are *not* left out of this blessing!** Jesus addresses *all of us* who have entered the story much, much later. We may not receive the same kind of bodily confirmation that Jesus gave to the originals and to Thomas, **but Jesus addresses our special circumstances in verse 29:** "Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet have come to believe."

Jesus pronounced an additional beatitude, a blessing upon those of us who *don't* see him in the flesh. If and when you and I feel ourselves losing faith, our doubts can push us to search even more fervently. **It's possible for us to believe too.**

Remember: the meaning of the verb "believe" is more than giving cognitive assent to the doctrine of the resurrection; not an intellectual enterprise alone. It is more about trust and relationship. The Latin root of "believe" is connected to love. It literally means to "give our heart to" the object of our belief.<sup>2</sup> Believing is something that we can choose and *practice*. There *is* something left for you to do. More specifically, **you and I can turn to the blessings that were already there and available** for Thomas, those that *he* rejected at the time.

**First of all, you can believe in yourself.** Sure, you have limits, and you are going to mess up. You have tremendous resources also, not least of which is your longing to be close to Christ. Reach for that blessing amid your doubts.

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, Catholic News Service, November 23, 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 40.

**The second blessing** available to you, as it was for Thomas, is your community of faith – the Church. While they are fallible, you can still **believe in your fellow travelers**. Remember their character, their best intentions, and hopes; they would not steer you wrong. If need be, you can also let the Church believe *for* you during a season of doubt.

**The third blessing** that Thomas didn't acknowledge at first is that the living Christ is actually *always* present for us. **Believe. Give your heart to him.**

Maybe you know this, but there is a gospel named for Thomas, possibly written by him as early as 62 CE from Syria or India where the apostle founded churches. In it are some sayings that the author attributes to Jesus – ones that you and I won't find in the four *biblical* gospels. One of them outlines the spiritual way to be alive in Christ, and it certainly sounds consistent with Thomas and the practices we have profiled today –

Jesus said: “The seeker should not stop until he finds. When he does find, he will be disturbed. After having been disturbed, he will be astonished. *Then* he will reign over everything.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Stevan Davies and Andrew Harvey, ed., *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), 3.