



John 20:24-31  
So That You May Believe: John  
“Skeptics Welcome”

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There is a lot in life that we each doubt and are skeptical about – from claims by politicians to the weather forecast – though Friday and yesterday certainly lived up to the billing. I will admit, some people’s doubts and skepticisms are rather mind-boggling. For instance, a 2016 public opinion poll found that 7% of Americans doubt that the earth is round.<sup>1</sup> Other polls in 2018 and 2022 have shown the number to be as high as 11%.<sup>2</sup> But, on the other hand, a large chunk of Americans are flabbergasted at people like me, who have doubts about country music.

So, the fact is: **We all have our doubts.** Oftentimes our doubts are in regards to those people who we are closest to us. As some of you know, Gwen and I have taken on a couple pretty significant home improvement projects – and we’ve done a lot of it ourselves – which means, *I’ve done a lot myself*. When we started, Gwen had her doubts and figured we’d end up hiring a lot more than we wanted to. Heck, even I had my doubts. I’d never built anything more than a tree fort and Ikea furniture.

But, with the help of the internet and friends who have construction experience – and hiring professionals for some parts – I was able to do it. With my Father-in-law’s assistance, I even did a lot of the electrical work – which totally shocked Gwen. And when I did the plumbing – again, with the help of a friend – most of her doubt was washed away. And after putting down the hard wood flooring, Gwen said that I had really nailed it. 😊

The point is, there was some initial doubt and skepticism from Gwen toward me about whether or not I could do this. **Doubt is just a part of life, and we’ve all doubted ourselves or others at different times.** In today’s passage we encounter the most famous doubter of all. He’s so well-known that we have a phrase in American culture to describe doubters, that is known beyond the walls of the church: “doubting Thomas.” So, let’s look at **John 20:24-31** this morning as we continue on our journey through the Gospel According to John, and see what to do with our doubts.

So, Thomas has two names, as we see here. **“Thomas” is Hebrew and “Didymus” is Greek. Both mean “twin” in their respective languages.** We don’t know who his twin was. Now, most likely he did actually have a twin brother who just isn’t mentioned in the Gospels – we know very little about the family’s of any of the disciples, so that’s nothing new. But it did occur to me this week that maybe there was just something about him that made people say, “he’s got enough of \_\_\_\_\_ for two people.” Enough strength, personality, joy, whatever. There was a band in the early- and mid-1990’s here in the Seattle area called Black Happy with a song that particularly got me thinking about this. They were a highly underrated band with a unique sound and lyrics that wove in the Christian faith. They have a line in one song that says, “I’m so happy I could be twins.”<sup>3</sup> Maybe that’s Thomas.

And Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them in the previous verses that we looked at last week. As we just read, the 10 go and tell him that they’ve seen Jesus, but he is skeptical. Now, we need to pause here and remember the other time Thomas is specifically mentioned in John’s gospel. Back in John 11, Jesus wants to go be with his friend Lazarus who is sick. Verse 8 gives us the disciples’ response: **“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?” (John 11:8).** In other words, that area isn’t safe for Jesus, and undoubtedly not for his disciples, either.

Then he gets word that Lazarus has actually died. This doesn’t deter Jesus, and he still wants to go; in fact, he decides he is going (John 11:15). This still sounds risky to the disciples. But Thomas pipes up. He says: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Thomas, John 11:16). Thomas is ready to go into enemy territory with Jesus, even if it means losing his life. This is the picture of a disciple who’s ready to follow Jesus no matter what – no reservations, no hesitations, no doubts that Jesus is worth living and dying for.

Fast forward to today’s passage, and Thomas is totally different. In thinking about this, I’m reminded of a parable Jesus teaches. **It’s a parable about those who hear the good news of Jesus, and Jesus compares them to different kind of dirt that some seed gets scattered onto, in Matthew 13.**

Some falls on the path where birds end up eating it; some fell on rocky ground where it springs up quickly but can't develop good roots and doesn't last very long; some seed fell among thorn bushes – the seed grew into plants but then they are choked out by the thorns and weeds; other seed falls on good soil that grows and it bears fruit – 100, 60, or 30 times what was sown.

If I were to improve his parable, which is probably a really audacious thing to do and I don't recommend trying to improve anything Jesus does or says...but if I were to improve it I would simply say that no one person is always and only one kind of dirt or the other. For example: some people initially reject the seed – it falls on a path and is scooped up and taken away and never gains root. But later, that same person ends up being more open and receptive and receives the good news of Jesus and trusts in him and ends up bearing fruit for him in their lives. Maybe that describes you: once you were unreceptive to Jesus, but then God softened your heart, and you received the Good News.

Thomas shows us that it can go the other way, too. He has literally followed Jesus every day for three years, then encounters something about Jesus that's outside his comfort zone, and now he doubts Jesus. The fact is: **There are lots of people who appreciate much of Jesus' teaching and think he was a wise guy who taught good principles...but don't believe he died for a purpose and was raised from the dead to new life.** They “get” and even like Jesus in the manger, or Jesus the teacher, or even Jesus the miracle-worker...but Jesus dead and raised again? That's where doubt creeps in for a lot of people.

That is Thomas. And, given that resurrection of dead people after three days is pretty rare (!) I for one am not going to come down too hard on him. Maybe you resonate with Thomas some. Maybe your faith ebbs and flows – following Jesus boldly one day, ready to die with him or for him, and then doubting and questioning Jesus another. Maybe the pre-cross Jesus is attractive to you, but the crucified and resurrected Jesus you're not so sure of, and you're skeptical like Thomas was.

If that's you, please know that doubts are fine...but don't just rest in your doubt and end there. **Don't allow doubt to keep you from seeking God.** Seek him out, and seek answers to your questions. Now, sometimes God gets a hold of us even when we aren't really seeking him. I had a conversation this week with a person who was an avowed atheist for several years until she was hit by a car and had an out of body experience. She recovered from the accident, and though I don't know any more details, she shared that her out of body experience led her to faith. Sometimes, even if we aren't looking for God, he will get a hold of us in profound ways – though I think probably a lot of us would prefer God to use other methods than what she experienced.

But Thomas doesn't let his doubts win the day. He may doubt, but he's open to the possibility that what the other disciples tell him really is true. And so, he asks for proof. He wants to see for himself. Let's continue in our passage. **John 20:26-31.**

So, when he's with the disciples a bit later, Jesus does come and show himself to Thomas. He encounters the resurrected Jesus and he responds in worship and adoration. Thomas stays open, and Jesus responds. **Similarly, you can bring your doubts to Jesus.** Ask God to show you himself. Ask him to give you peace in a stressful situation. Ask him to provide for you in some way. Ask him to reveal himself to you. The answers will come – they may not look the way you're expecting them to, but God will answer.

Now, while we *all* have questions, maybe even what we'd call doubts, many of us here this morning *have* met the resurrected Christ in some way and have put our trust and faith in him. Our doubts and questions are about other aspects of the Christian faith outside of Jesus crucified and resurrected, maybe even things that are quite peripheral. Or, maybe there is some doubt mixed in with faith even on the core things of our faith. But most of us here this morning have come to that place of faith and trust in Jesus, like the 10 disciples prior to Thomas encountering Jesus.

And so: **What we learn from the 10 disciples is that we should welcome the skeptics in among us.** I think it's crucial for us to recognize that Jesus met Thomas in the midst of the other disciples. Not on his own. Not while

he's out for a morning jog, or taking a shower, or fixing dinner at home for himself, or sitting around pondering the meaning of life by the shores of Lake Galilee. Jesus met him at a moment when he was surrounded by others who had previously met the resurrected Jesus. That doesn't mean Jesus *couldn't* have met him when he was on his own. But Jesus loves to work among the community of the believers. And so, we want to welcome people like Thomas, who question the reality of Jesus' resurrection. This is exactly where they should be. (By the way, if you're a skeptic, the point is true for you as well: You're much more likely to get your questions about Jesus answered when you're in relationship with Christians.)

We actually get a glimpse of this way earlier on in the gospel of John. Jesus does it when a couple of people – Andrew, and one other – ask Jesus a question about where he's staying, and Jesus says, “Come and see.” That's his invitation: to come and see. And just a few verses later, Philip has now joined in, and he goes to his buddy Nathanael, and when Nate expresses doubt about Jesus, Philip simply says, “Come and see” (John 1:35-51).

**So: From the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the very end, the invitation to people who question Jesus, who have doubts, who are skeptics...the invitation is “come and see.”** And in each instance, each person felt safe to “come and see” because they had a relationship. Thomas is the best example – he'd been with these guys for the previous three years. He could bring his doubts to the others, and look for Jesus to answer his questions.

So, whoever the people are in your life who might have doubts like Thomas: Invite them to come with their questions. Not *just* inviting them to come to church, but invite them into your life. In fact, start there. Find a way to connect with doubters. Get to know them over a cup of coffee or lunch or while watching a ball game or whatever. Ask questions that take the conversation deeper and when they share something that you connect with or had similar in your life, let them know you used to be live one way or struggle with something they're now struggling with, and now you don't. Or maybe you used to think like the majority of people, that you were a “good person” and God opened your eyes to the fact that you can't be good enough. Look for opportunities to just share those kinds of things and then let them

know if they ever want to know more about how you moved to a new way of living, behaving, or thinking, to just ask. You don't need to "drop Jesus" on them the first time. Just open the door for them to follow up at some point. And when they do – perhaps right then, or maybe some time later – that's when the door gets opened to talk about what Jesus has done in your life.

So, we must be in relationship with people, as they are, questions and doubts and all, and give them opportunities to come and see...to come and meet Jesus. He will meet them, and answer their doubts in his timing and in his way. Like he does here with Thomas, he will meet the doubters and the skeptics exactly in their place of doubt and skepticism.

And then let me close with this: **If you are like Thomas – full on skeptical of who Jesus is – then you are welcome here.** With an open heart and mind, perhaps a little patience, Jesus will show himself to you in life and in the pages of Scripture. In fact, that's why the gospels are written. John makes that clear at the end of the passage we read today. He says in verse 31 that he wrote so that "you may believe." So that Jesus would get ahold of whoever might get ahold of this. So that whoever might read it would meet the resurrected Jesus in the pages of this biography, and put their trust in Him.

I hope and pray that regardless of where each of us is in our faith journey...I pray that we each come to Jesus with that openness, so that by His spirit he would reveal himself to us, answer our questions, our skepticisms, our doubts...and lead us to a place of faith that grows deeper and deeper roots, bearing fruit for Him and his kingdom each and every day. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> After the 9:30 service someone did mention to me that technically, the earth is not round. It's a little oblong. I am aware of this but for our purposes, "round" is close enough – it's definitely not flat. ☺

<sup>2</sup> <https://theconversation.com/i-watched-hundreds-of-flat-earth-videos-to-learn-how-conspiracy-theories-spread-and-what-it-could-mean-for-fighting-disinformation-184589>; <https://www.gazette20.com/post/did-you-know-that-1-of-americans-believe-the-earth-is-flat>

<sup>3</sup> From the song, "Yes...And It Counts." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1yXguaVFuk>