

We often judge people by one mistake. We never let them forget it, and we never let the world forget it. We tend to forget the good as soon as something goes wrong, which is unfair and very unhelpful.

This is what happened to Thomas, one of the twelve disciples. He is not remembered for all the times he was brave and confident in his faith, but for the one time he doubted. Today, when someone is skeptical, we call that person a Doubting Thomas. This is very unfair because Thomas was one of the most steadfast and loyal apostles among the Twelve. (Did you know that? How many times have we wrongly judged someone, too?)

Today, we will learn from one of the bravest and most honest disciples about faith and doubt and how doubt is a good thing, not a bad one.

Have you doubted what you thought you knew? Perhaps you have asked some of these questions:

Is the Bible the Word of God? Is Jesus the Son of God? Did he really rise from the dead? Am I really a Christian? Why do I still feel guilty? Why did my marriage break up? Why did my friend betray me? Where was God when my mom was sick?

These are honest questions, hard ones indeed, and have been asked by many people. I am pretty sure most of us have asked questions like these and may have felt bad for doing so because we should know better, right? But is doubting bad? Is it unbecoming of Christian character?

Let's explore this subject with today's text from John 20:24-28,

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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." 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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Who is Thomas, and what can we learn from him to help us in our life struggles? Let's review who Thomas is besides "Doubting Thomas."

Thomas first steps onto the stage of biblical history in John 11. Lazarus had just died in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples are in the area of Jericho when they get the word. When he decides to go to Bethany, his disciples remind him that the leaders tried to stone him to death the last time he went near Jerusalem. It would be suicidal to go back.

Jesus decides to go anyway, but the disciples are unconvinced. At that point, Thomas speaks up and says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). It is a brief statement that reveals enormous courage—this is Courageous Thomas.

Then, John's gospel mentions Thomas one other time before the crucifixion. It is late Thursday night in the Upper Room. Jesus had just washed the disciples' feet and given them the great command to love one another. All except Judas are gathered around Jesus, knowing the end is not far away. To them, Jesus said,

"I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place I am going..." (John 14:1-4).

Thomas had been listening quietly and carefully, and in a moment of great honesty, he said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). The rest of the disciples were just as perplexed, but only Thomas dared to speak out because he wanted to understand. That is Honest Thomas.

With this, the picture we have of him on the eve of the crucifixion is this: he is a brave man, intensely loyal and deeply committed to Jesus. If need be, he is ready to lay down his own life. He is honest, too, unwilling to remain silent, pretending to know when he does not. He is brave, and he is honest. It is too bad that he is not remembered as Courageous or Honest Thomas but as Doubting Thomas.

I think this speaks to us in meaningful ways. Often, we are stuck in our faith because we are afraid of being judged for having questions or labeled somewhat faithless for having doubts. Sadly, your fears may be warranted; people do judge and assign labels when they are afraid or do not understand other people's life experiences.

Why is that? In part, people are afraid when someone is too honest or brave because they want to keep everything in control, unchanged, outdated, and manageable. But also, when someone dares to question and admit their doubts openly, it invites others to confront their uncertainties, too, and that is scary because not everyone is willing or ready to admit they have questions. It is easier, then, to label and dismiss than to engage and reflect.

Have you been called names or silenced for having questions? For thinking outside the box? Heck, for having faith? Yes, because the spectrum of labeling is broad, from Doubting Thomas to Fanatic Christian. They call you names or try to silence you because they are afraid of not having control over you. But this desire for control, for a faith that is unchanging and manageable, betrays the nature of faith itself.

However, in my personal experience, it is in the courage to question and the humility to admit doubt that we encounter the true nature of God's relationship with us and grow in it. God

does not demand blind allegiance or unthinking acceptance. Rather, God invites us into a relationship characterized by growth, exploration, and deepening understanding. For example, in the Scriptures, we see a God who engages with doubters, answers the cry of the uncertain heart, and walks alongside us in our quest for truth. Both Job and David repeatedly questioned God, but they were not condemned. This means our relationship with God is not of control and fear but of love and freedom. Once we realize this, it becomes clear that our spiritual health thrives not on unquestioned beliefs but on the courage to explore and to ask.

As you can see, having questions is not bad after all. Still, how often have we thought less of ourselves because we had questions and doubts and thought it was wrong? How many times have we internalized other people's fears and allowed them to constrain our thoughts and longing for deeper connections with God? I hope it is becoming clear by now that God does not condemn your questions or doubts and should not condemn yourself for them.

With this, let's get back to the story to understand what happened to Thomas further.

So, John tells us that Thomas was not present on that Sunday evening when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst (John 20:19-25). The Bible doesn't say why, but I think I know.

Thomas has a broken heart. He still loves, cares, and wants to believe, but his heart is broken. He is not a bad person, nor is his doubt sinful. Some of you know that there is no doubt like the doubt of a broken heart. Thomas is not an evil skeptic; he is a wounded believer. He was not unwilling to believe but unable because his grief clouded his feelings and thoughts.

After all these years, Thomas has gotten a bad reputation. Doubting Thomas, we call him. Is it fair to call him that? We tend to look down on him. But not Jesus. Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time. This time, Thomas was with them, and Jesus spoke to him as one whose faith was struggling, not to one with an evil heart. He said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).

Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He knew he was heartbroken. Jesus didn't put him down; instead, he said, "Go ahead. See for yourself. Stop doubting and believe." Jesus did not condemn Thomas for his doubts. Jesus spoke to him as a sincere disciple whose faith was battling, not as one with an evil heart, and gave him his faith back. And Thomas' answer was immediate: He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet and exclaimed with a warm, passionate cry of joy, "My Lord and my God!"

Here, we have a doubter attaining the fullest and firmest belief because he asked to understand. This happens very often, where those who ask the toughest questions become the strongest believers because they refuse a "pretending faith" and instead seek understanding.

Tertullian, a Theologian from the early church, said about Christians, "No man would be willing to die unless he knew he had the truth." He meant that as the early Christians were being persecuted and killed because of their faith, they would not have died for a dream. They would not have been loyal to a figment of their imagination. Likewise, Thomas was willing to die many times alongside Jesus because his faith was unhesitant; when he doubted, he was not an unbeliever; he was seeking understanding.

What does all this mean to us? Many people think asking questions or doubting is the opposite of faith, but it isn't. Doubt is not refusing, rejecting, or denying faith but seeking understanding. Many people think doubt is unforgivable, but it isn't. God doesn't condemn us when we have questions about life, faith, or anything else. God is big enough to handle all our doubts and all our questions. Many people have been taught that struggling with doubts means we lack faith, but that's not true. Struggling with doubt is a sure sign that we truly have faith. Doubt doesn't come from a place of unbelief but from trying to understand more. If we never struggle with questions, our faith will never mature and grow stronger.

I hope and pray that you never stop asking questions, that you never stop being curious about God and your faith, and that you will continue to be amazed by God's grace and mysteries.

Here is the good news and invitation today: God never turns an honest doubter away. Never. So come to God with your doubts, skepticism, hard questions, and sincere uncertainties. Build your life and faith on what you already have and know, and then continue to grow as you understand more of what you don't know yet.