

Every year on this Sunday after Easter, we hear the same story from the Gospel of John, the story of Thomas doubting the risen Lord. His famous words, "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," they seem rather abrasive to me, in light of having just celebrated the hope that feels so real in Holy Week. And this story is one that has often been used to tell us what not to be, a doubter - don't want to be that.

Personally, I've always felt a little bit sorry for Thomas, that his story gets told this day, year after year. And we've given him this awful nickname, Doubting Thomas. So, today for the sermon, I wrote him a letter, and I want to tell him some things that I appreciate in his story and try to change the narrative a little bit that he's been given. So here we go. Here's my letter to Thomas.

Dear Thomas, I'd like to begin by apologizing for something. I don't know if you know this or not, but we've given you a nickname, Doubting Thomas. It stuck for a long time, so long now that it's too hard to change it. So, I want to recognize you for something in this nickname, this Doubting Thomas. It does not recognize you and take into consideration all of the other moments that you had with Jesus, where you followed, where you obeyed, where you've listened so faithfully. We've forgotten all that.

So you weren't perfect. But who is? Thomas, perhaps we've told your story too simply. We've reduced it to a slogan. Don't doubt, just believe as if faith were that easy.

But anyone who has ever sat with feelings of doubt before knows that it's not something you can just snap out of. Don't doubt, but believe, sounds a lot simpler than it actually is.

Thomas, we've held up your response as a warning when maybe it was never meant to be that way. And I wonder if we've missed the gifts of your story because we've been too caught up shaming you for the whole doubting thing.

Yes, you weren't there the first time when Jesus appeared to the disciples, but this was before text messages and group chats. Maybe you just didn't know where to go. Maybe they left you off the thread. Whoops.

Or maybe you stepped out for a minute to yourself, or maybe you were actually afraid. After all, it was a rather frightening time. Your friend had just been crucified.

So, yes, you were late to the meeting, but you weren't too late. And that's what made all the difference. You still came back, you still found the others, you still kept trying.

For me, every Easter, I try to remember that the Resurrection must have been a bewildering thing to witness firsthand. We can take it for granted. We've heard the story, we've been to the Easter services, but people do not rise from the dead.

The Resurrection is the ultimate sign of God making the impossible possible. It must have been bewildering to get that news. And I think I would have had questions, too, if I was there in these first days.

So, I'm not sure, Thomas, if we should call your response doubt. Maybe a more accurate word would be, honesty. You didn't believe what everyone else was saying and you had the courage to say so out loud in a room full of people who disagreed with you. Now that takes courage. That's something to behold instead of to shame. I think that's what we would call, being brave.

It's not failure, shown even more so because the risen Lord, even in your doubt, still comes to you, proving that we don't have to have our beliefs all worked out before we have an experience of the Resurrection, before Jesus is real to us. Sometimes experiences of the Holy come before the clarity.

There are many people who drift away from a life of faith, not because they reject it, but because it never quite felt real to them to begin with. It can feel like something that was just handed down like an old coat, something we're told to do, but it's never something that we've truly encountered.

And a faith like that can be hard to sustain. Not because there's something wrong with the person, but because we're made to long for something more than secondhand stories. We long for something that we can recognize as true, something that meets us in our actual lives, something that we know in our hearts.

We live in a world that increasingly promises us something else entirely. A world that suggests everything can be explained, everything can be optimized, answered. In our culture, there's a growing sense that every question has a response, every mystery and explanation. Why would we spend time contemplating the Holy, or sitting with uncertainty, or being awash in the glory of it all if we no longer have a sense of mystery?

That's why I find myself praying, especially for young people, that they might have moments, experiences that are just strange enough, just unexpected enough to awaken a sense of wonder and to hold onto that wonder.

A child asked me recently, "Why is the sky so big?" And I thought, "What a gift that question is." It's not something to solve. I could have looked it up. We could have given an explanation, but it's not like that. It's something to live into. A reminder that the world is larger and deeper and more mysterious than we can explain. A great starting point for a life of faith is wonder and genuine curiosity.

Thomas, before I go, there's one more thing that we've missed in your story and that I love: the wounds. There's a painting by Caravaggio, it's in our bulletins this morning, that shows your encounter with Jesus, you leaning in so close, your hand almost touching his side. Something, it's an uncomfortable image that the wounds are just too real, Thomas is too close.

But I find it a beautiful one because the risen Christ still carries his wounds, not as something to hide, not as something to be ashamed of, but as a sign that even the deepest suffering is not lost to God. How beautiful.

And if that's not the story of Christian life and hope, I don't know what is. If Jesus can show his wounds and not be ashamed, then maybe so can we. We can claim that our wounds don't tell the entire story about us, that they are not a source of shame, but a place to see your work of redemption in this world.

And finally, Thomas, I began with an apology, but let me end with a thank you. Thank you for your honesty. Thank you for your courage. Thank you for showing up even when you weren't sure. Thank you for insisting that faith be something real in this world, and for reminding us that resurrection does not erase wounds, but by the grace of God transforms them.

Because the truth is, Thomas, we are not so different from each other. Still, in 2026, we know something about locked rooms. We know what it is to be afraid, to sit behind closed doors, unsure of what comes next, to carry questions that we don't know how to answer. And still, Jesus comes through even the most impossible of situations. The door might be locked, but you taught us to take heart, for Jesus is already inside, waiting to proclaim peace and to set us free.

So that's all for now. Take good care. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you at the same spot again next year. Amen.