

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

I'm gonna let you in on a little secret:

Are you ready?

WE ALL HAVE DOUBTS

We all have doubts... plain and simple

Anyone who tells you that they never doubt...is lying.

Either to you, or to themselves, or both.

Doubt is a part of being human.

And contrary to what some may think

Doubt is not mutually exclusive to faith.

Sometimes our doubt is small... that little nagging feeling inside us,

That little "what if" that is there, but doesn't really interfere with our daily functioning.

But sometimes our doubt is overwhelming...almost debilitating.

One of my clearest memories of overwhelming personal doubt

Came as I was preparing for my first funeral as an ordained pastor.

Now I had assisted at funerals as a student

but this was the first one I was leading alone.

So naturally, I was nervous, but I expected that .

What I didn't expect was to have a major crisis of faith.

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...while I was writing my sermon, I became fear-stricken.

all of a sudden a wave of doubt overtook me.

and a whole host of questions filled my mind

what if it's not true?

What if I am going to stand up and tell these people that their loved one is in heaven, and it's all a joke?

What if there is no God and therefore, no eternal life?

What if this is all there is?

I remember literally getting down on my knees and laying face down on the floor of my office,

Praying for help.

Praying for God to give me some sign to let me know that it was all real.

But I didn't get that sign....at least not at that moment.

So I picked myself up off the floor,

and wrote my sermon, even with all the doubts,
a continuous prayer on my mind...three simple words
“Help me God..Help me, God...

In hindsight, I find it
interesting that even in the midst of doubting God’s existence,
I knew instinctively that this God was the only one who could help me.

I can’t even remember what I said to that family on the day of the funeral
And it is probably just as well.
Because I am certain that God worked not so much through me that day, but
instead, God worked in spite of me that day.

Somehow, God’s Word got through to that grieving family.
And ironically, Thomas was in that story on that day as well.
The family picked John 14...where Jesus tells his disciples that he
Goes to prepare a place for them.
And Jesus says ..”you know the place where I am going”
But Thomas says, “we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?”
Jesus says “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”

And that family believed it.
You could see it in their eyes;
They clung to every one of God’s words of hope and new life.
They believed, and they were drawing strength from it.
God spoke directly to their hearts in spite of my doubts,
and I found that their response, their silent response of faith, became the sign that
I had asked God for.

We all doubt.

In fact, much of the time we doubt **in the very same moment** that we believe.
I think one of the most honest statements in the Gospels was made by a man who wanted
Jesus to heal his son. He told Jesus...heal him if you can.
And somewhat offended, Jesus said,
“If I can?”
The man said, “I believe, help my unbelief”

I believe, help me unbelief.

Doubt is not necessarily a sign of the absence of faith.
In fact, it is an act of faith to acknowledge and share our doubts with God.
If we had no faith, we would take our doubts to some human source,
But what an act of faith to take our concerns to God even in the moments when we are
not sure that there is a God!

We all doubt.

And what if our doubt actually serves some deeper purpose?

I mean, moments of certainty are nice...they feel good.

They can be powerful...like last Sunday with all the smells, and colors, and sounds, and shouts of Alleluias

But it is often the moments of doubt that actually end up being the catalysts for our being drawn into a deeper relationship with God.

Doubt can actually give way to enlightenment,

Doubt can actually give way to a stronger sense of faith.

At least that's what it seems like for Thomas

Thomas hadn't been there when Jesus appeared to the other ten.

And because of his absence, he doubted that Jesus was alive.

Although it seems like even more than doubt;

Perhaps there was actually some stubbornness and need for control thrown in there too.

Thomas said, "I will not believe unless...."

And maybe it was that doubt and stubbornness,

that opened the way for his unique encounter with the Risen Jesus that was beyond even that of other disciples experienced.

Think about it: Jesus had appeared to them a week prior, and although the text tells us they were filled with joy here they were still locked up in that room.

Had they not be changed by their encounter with the Risen Jesus?

If not, then no wonder Thomas didn't believe them.

So perhaps it was actually Thomas' doubt, and his honesty about that doubt, that opened him up to a deeper encounter with Jesus.

Think about it:

Jesus comes to Thomas and offers himself to him...without rebuke or ridicule.

He simply says, "put your hand here."

And Thomas has an extreme reaction.

He didn't just say, "okay, so you are alive. The others were right.

Nor did he get distracted by the mechanics of it asking, "how did this happen?"

He didn't even say, "yeah, let me feel those marks"

For all his posturing before Jesus' arrival,

Thomas ends up skipping right over all that and proclaiming a more profound faith statement than any of the disciples...

Before Jesus' death Peter had proclaimed him as the Messiah, the anointed one from God.

Now Thomas is actually the first one to proclaim Jesus as God.

Thomas says: My Lord and My God!

I wonder if he would not have gotten to that extreme joy and certainty Without going through the extreme doubt.

Could it be that it is in our moments of deepest doubt and fear and confusion.
that God is able to find an entry point to strengthen our faith?

Even though they were in the locked room, Jesus entered in;

No mention of the need for a key or lock combination.

Instead, Jesus walked right in to that room with out any effort at all.

And it is the same with us.

.Jesus is willing and able to walk right into our of deepest doubts and fears,
bringing his patient and loving presence, so that he can transform our doubt into
belief.

Jesus can take our moments of deepest doubts and turn them into our moments of
strongest belief.

Jesus can take our statements of **“I can’t believe it” - I just can’t see God** and
turn them into **“I can’t believe it! Did you see what God has done? .**

I do believe that if I did not go through that experience of extreme doubt in prepping for
my first funeral, I probably would not have appreciated the importance of funeral
preaching.

I may have delivered that sermon without understanding the profound importance of the
Gospel for those who are grieving.

I have gone to funerals and left thinking “where was the good news?”

Where was the Gospel?

People who are grieving need to hear that God’s promises are sure.

We all need to hear that God’s promises are sure.

Even the strongest of faith among us need to hear the gospel is sure.

We all need to hear that God loves us and will never leave us;

Not in this life, and certainly not in the next.

It seems that is why God places us into a community of faith.

To give us a place where we know we can hear the Gospel

To give us a place where we know we can bring our hopes and our doubts

To give us a place where fellow disciples will encourage us and give us words of faith
when we have none of our own to draw on.

Today, we will receive new members at the I I am worship service.

And when they completed their spiritual gifts inventories, we were surprised that we had
several people with a strong gift of exhortation...spiritual encouragement.

Please know that God is continuously equipping our community with the people we
need to more fully support one another in our life together as Resurrection People.

Resurrection people who live both by faith, even as we doubt.

Let us pray: Lord we believe, help our unbelief. amen