

Thomas: The Patron Saint of Skeptics, Doubters, and Cynics

By Rev. Katie Hambrick Suddeth

Do you ever have doubts about God?

Or maybe your doubt are not about the existence of God, but the Christian story-

did Jesus really rise again from the grave-

Is this story literal or metaphorical?

Are the southern baptists right and if I question God or the story, will I go to the Hell they preach so often about?

One of the most frustrating things in my life is not having all the answers. I thought when I accepted the call to ministry and went to seminary that I would somehow get some magical insight- that God would tell me exactly what God was thinking and then I would know all the answers and truth about God. And I would try as a seminary student, to put God into these boxes. I would learn something new, then be like okay so that new thing means God is this, and I would put God in that box. I would then see something I'd consider a sign from God, so I would have to take God out of that old box that did not fit him anymore and put him into this new box.

Finally towards the end of my second year of seminary, I went to one of my professor's office hours and informed him that my struggle to define God was over. I told him about all the little boxes and labels that I put God in. I was so proud and arrogant. Dr. Jung looked at me and said, "I am sorry to inform you of this, but if you think you have God figured out, it isn't God."

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That moment changed my life. When we stop putting God in boxes and remove our expectations, that is when we get to experience real grace and salvation.

It was after that conversation with Dr. Jung that I realized that I was not only not going to find all the answers, but I was actually going to be left with more questions than answers. I was frustrated and shared that frustration with a peer. He was in his third year in seminary, while I was in my first. He understood my frustration and assured me it was part of the process. He also recited a quote from a famous poet that I will never forget:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

When we stop seeking signs and answers for all of our questions, and instead lean into the uncomfortable questions, we will one day realize we are living into our answers.

Thomas is experiencing that in a real tangible way in today's text. Thomas gets a bad wrap, but honestly he is the most realistic disciple and person in this whole narrative. The disciples come to him and say they have just seen Jesus- their friend- alive. And thomas is like, “yeah okay, do

you not remember that our friend got tortured and killed and buried? People don't just come back from the dead."

I mean if you have never witnessed someone coming back from the dead, why would any rational person take their word for it? He must have thought from the trauma or going crazy from being in hiding that they were going insane. Thomas is the rational sane disciple. He is the realist in the group. So Thomas says, "Okay, guys. I'll believe you if he appears and I get to touch his wounds."

Jesus appears a week later and allows Thomas to see. Jesus then says something that gives Thomas a bad wrap. He says "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." To be honest, that does not seem very fair to Thomas or to us.

"This is where our own experience might overlap with Thomas and what makes him so relate-able. As much as we have celebrated the resurrection, we want to accept fully, we want to believe with every bit of our heart and mind, it's so overwhelming that we too can fall into a place of having doubts. This too is good news.

The freedom to doubt and wrestle with ideas about God and our relationship with God are important to our own formation just like it was for Thomas. We are creatures who crave certainty. We search for order to make sense of things, to understand the world, to organize all the data that comes to our awareness. We want a logical explanation to solve the problems that we encounter.

Faith defies our need of logical and concrete answers. Faith is a mystery of the heart that the mind wants to solve. Still, we want faith to be shored up by certain evidences so that the leap of faith is a manageable one. the resurrection is the hardest thing for our minds to take in. Nothing

in life is more certain than death. Or more permanent. For Jesus to be raised from the dead boggles the mind. It just can't happen. This is where Thomas is coming from.”¹

This text is typically taught that Jesus is judging Thomas. That we too should judge Thomas and be warned to doubt or question the Lord or the story. That isn't really the case. It is not a command or demand for us to have no doubts or questions. It is an acknowledgement that we will have doubts and questions that we may never get the concrete or logical answers to that we desire.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” I wonder if Jesus is not saying blessed are those who accept with blind faith. I wonder if Jesus is saying blessed are those who can live in the grey area of doubt and uncertainty, yet still have faith. Blessed are those who question and do not require answers. Blessed are those willing to accept the ambiguity that comes with all things related to the divine. Blessed are those that live into the process of faith.

We have discussed before that faith is a process and not a one time thing. We also know that this process is painful at times. It is painful because it is a constant cycle of growth. It is a constant cycle of thinking you have it all figured out, then bam, you get hit with something new that you didn't know before and you have to reassess everything. It is a never ending cycle of doubt, belief, questioning, and conviction.

¹ <https://www.stmatthiaswhittier.org/blog/2020/4/19/the-second-sunday-in-easter-doubting-thomas>

I will confess I hate growth. It disturbs my inner peace. It makes me have to apologize for ignorant and arrogant things I have said and done. It makes me have to change the way in which I do things, even when I am so comfortable in my old ways. I hate it. I hate it too because it often leaves me with more questions than answers- more uncertainties than comforts.

Yet, the process is so important. When we engage in the process of faith, we allow God's tender leading to transform us. We allow God to show us new and deeper things that are beyond anything we could imagine. We are not limited to the boxes we would have God live in. Jesus is not saying there is anything wrong with questioning. What Jesus is saying is that we have to accept that we won't have concrete evidence as answers for every question or doubt we have. Sometimes the real growth comes by accepting the question itself. By living into the questions of our hearts and minds, so maybe one day we will find that we are living into the answer. Amen.