

Leave Room for the Lord

King of Glory Lutheran
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Easter 2: Year C: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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.” ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

‘Great’ Christians who have struggled with doubt. All of us can and will doubt at some point, just like Thomas. Jesus didn’t abandon Thomas in his doubt, but instead came alongside.

Do you remember after Mother Teresa died? There was a book of letters, that she actually wanted destroyed, but which were published after her death. In those letters, she poured out her heart to God. The media, as I remember, made a great fuss about this woman who was such a giant of the faith, and now it was revealed that she had doubts about her faith. They seemed to forget she was human.

Within those now published letters, Mother Teresa wrote, “Darkness is such that I really do not see—neither with my mind nor with my reason—the place of God in my soul is blank—There is no God in me—when the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God. ... The torture and pain I can’t explain.”ⁱ

Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest who wrote the best-selling *My Life With the Saints*. “I think that this is a real treasure for not only believers, but even doubters and skeptics,” Martin said. “I think it also makes her much more accessible to the everyday believer. It shows that even the saints struggle in their spiritual lives and that they don’t have it easier than we do. They sometimes have it harder than we do.”

Mother Teresa said her ‘darkness’ was an intense loneliness that she felt, an absence of being in the presence of God. We can only imagine her work on a daily basis, ministering to the poor, and not having the accompanying feeling of God’s undergirding strength and presence. It must have been incredibly difficult. For Mother Teresa this was what mystics have long called ‘the dark night of the soul.’ And it brought her doubts, because it’s hard to believe.

C.S. Lewis is well known in the Christian world for his prolific writings: *Mere Christianity*, and *The Screwtape Letters* for example. In 1941, Lewis founded the Oxford Socratic Club, whose soul purpose was to debate the pros and cons of Christianity. Lewis had the honor of being the first to respond to the invited guest. But on one night, it went horribly south. A Catholic philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, tore apart Lewis’ argument in one chapter of his book, *Miracles*. It was about the very existence of God. Lewis conceded defeat; that his argument for God’s existence had been demolished.ⁱⁱ

He later wrote this, “Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods ... That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods ‘where they get off,’ you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist.” He talked about the need to ‘fall back continually from the web of our own arguments,... into the Reality — (of) Christ Himself.’

Our own Martin Luther, struggled with his own doubts. ‘At one point, the crushing doubt in his calling led to such an intense depression that he wrote, “For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy of God.”’ⁱⁱⁱ

Pope Francis, verbalized doubt in our language. “Who among us—everybody, everybody!—who among us has not experienced insecurity, loss and even doubts on their journey of faith? We’ve all experienced this, me too. It is part of the journey of faith, it is part of our lives. This should not surprise us, because we are human beings, marked by fragility and limitations.” He went on to say, “The great

leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble.”

We must leave room for the Lord, not our certainties. In other words, at some point, perhaps at many, many junctures and detours and on ramps of life, we all take that ‘leap of faith’ and we don’t do it alone. God gives us the tiniest seed of trust. We don’t get it from our minds, our intellects, our absolute and resolute reasoning to fully grasp the things of faith. No. God grants us the ability as one of my pastor friends says, to jump from lily pad to lily pad of faith. We ‘must leave room for the Lord.’

Which is what Thomas did. He didn’t want to depend upon his friends’ words. As trustworthy as those might have been. He needed to see his rabbi. Thomas wanted to be in the presence of...Jesus. He left room for the Lord to convince him. As a said, man in Mark’s Gospel said to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:23-25)

Paul Tillich once wrote, “Doubt is an essential part of faith.” Doubt is an essential part of faith. Who doesn’t wonder, or feel some amount of uncertainty, reservations or at the very least misgivings when life isn’t going as we think it should and there don’t seem to be any answers. God doesn’t appear to be showing up or providing answers to prayer. The process is too slow. All of our logic isn’t satisfying either.

Thomas was only human. He didn’t understand what the resurrection meant and neither would we. Thomas came to Jesus humbly. Honestly. ‘Unless I see those marks where the nails were!’ Clearly, he had seen the crucifixion. Now he needed to see resurrection...for himself. It was that seeing that led him to proclaim, “My Lord and my God.”

Last weekend, we sang with all our hearts and all faith, “Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son.” Yet I’m thankful that this text always follows directly, the next weekend. None of us can sing confidently about resurrection each weekend. If we think we can, we’re kidding ourselves. Life comes at us, with all its concreteness. We get stymied. We wonder...is God going to help me through this one?

According to tradition, Thomas travelled outside Rome to India, beginning eight churches there. He is the patron saint of India. The Feast of St. Thomas on July 3rd is celebrated as Indian Christians Day. Not only India, but churches in the Middle East and Southern Asia mention Thomas as the evangelist who established them.

Once again, as throughout scripture, God used regular men and women for God's purposes. None of them were perfect. None of them super-human. All of them faith filled people with questions and doubts and character flaws. Today, we remember and thank God for Saint Thomas.

Together with he and the rest of the holy church, we profess, "My Lord and my God." Christ is Risen. Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2007/08/book-uncovers-lonely-spiritually-desolate-mother-teresa/>

ⁱⁱ <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/doubt-and-the-apologist>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/seven-prominent-christian-thinkers-who-wrestled-doubt/>