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Doubt
John 20:19-31

9 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.

There's **quite a bit** in this story to think about.

Let's just take the **first** part.

Jesus appeared to scared disciples in a locked room, as their risen Lord—even showing them his scars!

Wow. Can you even **imagine**?

And the first thing he says is **Peace be with you**.

Isn't that exactly what they **need**?

They are scared out of their minds because their teacher and Lord has been crucified and they might be next.

They are drained, emotionally and physically, from the loss and confusion of losing Him.

And he appears suddenly in this locked room, and says **Peace be with you**.

I don't know about you, but **I would welcome** those words.

I often **long** for that, don't you?

Peace. Peace be with you.

We say it so easily when we greet one another at the beginning of worship, but **do we realize what we are saying?**

The peace of Christ is peace, **shalom**.

It is also **forgiveness, and grace**.

Jesus came to offer them peace, and grace—for they had betrayed him, run away from him at his arrest and crucifixion.

We are offering the **Peace of Christ** in a world that is anything but peaceful.

We are offering the peace of Christ, and we're probably not fully at peace today.

Aren't most of us **struggling** with something?....with fear, rejection, isolation, anger, temptation?

And don't most of us need to know that **God forgives us, offers us grace?**

When we say Peace of Christ be with you, we are saying something that is potentially **powerful, and life-changing**, if we stop to take it in.

Peace is the very first thing Jesus brings to his scared followers.

What if that was something **we tried to bring** to one another, every time we gather together?

After Jesus says this, they recognize him, and he **says it again**,

Peace be with you.

And then he tells them he is **sending** them out,

as he breathes on them the **Holy Spirit**.

Can you imagine it?

Jesus—is alive and standing before them.

And he is coming to bring them **peace**, to give them the breath of the **Holy Spirit**,

a new **mission** in the world,

and the power to **forgive** or retain the sins of others.

It's all so incredible.

This whole story has such **deep meaning** for all of us today.

It's no accident that Jesus brings them **peace**,

a **mission**,

the **Holy Spirit**,

and the power of **forgiveness**.

After all, isn't all of that **why he died and was resurrected?**

Ephesians 2 says that **Christ IS our peace**.

He didn't come bring a sword,

he came bringing peace to a broken world.
 And it was his mission to teach and preach, and to die on the cross—why?
 To **forgive us, and give us the power** to forgive one another.

And then he was raised from death—
 And **new life was breathed** into him.
 He was full of the **Holy Spirit** when he was resurrected—
 that's why he's able to breathe the Spirit into them.
 The Spirit is the power he is transferring to his followers.
 And isn't that the **same power** available to each of us today?
 I believe it is.

But the **story doesn't stop** with this amazing appearance of Jesus.
 He leaves, and they have received His power.

But **Thomas**—was not with them.
 And he had his **doubts** about whether they had seen Jesus in that locked room.

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."

Well, now the next part is some of the **greatest news ever**.
 Thomas doubted the other disciples, so Jesus shows up again.
 Jesus doesn't just leave him in his doubt,
 he **responds to Thomas' need** to see him, to touch his scars.
 So **Jesus meets Thomas where he was** in his faith.
 Don't you think that Jesus does the **same thing** for all of us today?

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."

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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."

Wow.
 What would you have done?
 I might have fallen on the floor.
 What if **YOU** were Thomas?

Well, I think truth be told, **a lot of us are like Thomas**.
 Don't we have our own doubts?
 about the existence of God?
 about God's work in our world, or in our lives?

about God's goodness?

We've given Thomas a bad rap.

We call him "**Doubting Thomas**", and we kind of look down on him. But he's really **Honest Thomas**, honest, realistic—even courageous.

Thomas is mentioned a couple other times in the scriptures: When Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to die in Jerusalem, Thomas believes him. He has the courage to suggest that **they die with him**.

When Jesus says that he is going to prepare a place for them in heaven and then return, Thomas is the one who says, 'wait a minute, **we don't know where you are going!** How can we know the way?' And when are you coming back? He's **realistic, honest, he says** what others might be thinking.

He's the one wondering, how can their dearest friend and Lord, brutally crucified on the cross, be alive and well 3 days later?

But we know they **ALL had doubts**, because after Jesus' death they **locked** themselves in a room, afraid of being persecuted, afraid of the future.

Jesus' disciples had **doubts about Mary's good news** of the empty tomb. And you know I think they didn't believe that had enough people or power to carry on Jesus' ministry. They doubted the news, and they doubted themselves.... And that's when **Jesus appeared** to them in a locked room!

But aren't **a lot of us doubters like Thomas**? Realists? Skeptics?

Can you relate to any of that?

I can.

I'm a very optimistic person, but I'm also a **realist**. I see too much of the real world, so I believe that life and faith are not a formula. Life is a mess, no matter how much you believe in God.

And I know that **some of the most faithful** people in the Bible had some of the toughest lives. We can't expect to get everything we want from God—life is a mess. God doesn't always say yes (thankfully), and evil is still at work in the world.

But when I hear this story about Thomas. It gives me some **real hope**.

Hope that Jesus *meets me right where I am in my faith*.
 That Jesus still gives us the Holy Spirit, grace, the power to forgive!
 What about *you*?

So many of us say we *could* believe in God, if God would only send a SIGN.

There's a *Peanuts* comic strip similar to this Thomas story,
 Charlie Brown is talking with Lucy as they walk home on the last day of school. Charlie
 Brown says to Lucy:
 "Lucy, I got straight A's! Isn't that great?"

Lucy in her typical fashion shoots down poor Charlie Brown and says:
 I don't believe you Charlie Brown.
 Unless you *show me* your report card, I cannot believe you."

Frederick Buechner, the Presbyterian novelist and preacher, used to wonder, why doesn't
 God send a sign with the rearrangement of the sun and moon, so the night sky would read,
 "*I Am God! I Really Do Exist!!!!*"

Well, we usually don't get those kind of signs.
 But in this story—*Jesus does show up when Thomas doubts!*
 He comes back a week later,
 saying "Peace. Put your finger here and see my hands.
 Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
 Do not doubt but believe."

And what does Thomas' do then? He says, "*My Lord, and my God!*"
 Jesus says, "*Have you believed because you have seen me?*
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Who among us hasn't been *just like Thomas*?
 Doubting God's promises?
 Doubting what others, and the Bible, say is true?
 Wanting our own sign from God?

How many times have you *asked God for a sign*?
 For some proof that everything you've been taught, all that you've heard, is real?

But what if, *real faith includes doubt*?
 Denial is the opposite of faith, what if *doubt is a part of faith*?
 I think it is.

You know, I was so moved that one of the modern day saints, *Mother Teresa*, had her
doubts!

Did you know that?
They found letters after her death, revealing her doubts—
in the existence of God, in the goodness of God,
doubts about how to survive all the suffering she saw!
And still she served the suffering, ***still she had faith!***

You know what's so important in our story today?
Jesus didn't condemn Thomas for his doubts.
He met him, right where he was.

We can become paralyzed by our doubt and fear.
But what if sometimes the doubts ***get us where we need to be...***
into the presence of Jesus? Receiving the Holy Spirit, grace, the power to forgive?

Have you ever come to the place that you honestly
No longer expected God to show up in your life?
Are you there right now?

I think that's ok.
Go ahead and doubt.
Jesus knows our doubts, he knows where and how we struggle,
So let's admit it!
God respects that.

Doubting is ***real***.
It's ***honest***.

If we are doubters, we're in ***good company*** with our Biblical ancestors:
In Genesis 17 Abraham doubts God's promises of descendants.
and Sarah laughs about God's promise of a child in her old age!

In Matthew 14:31 Peter gets out of the boat while Jesus is walking on the water, but he
doubts and looks at the waves, and starts to sink.

If we have our doubts about God, we're in good company.
And like Thomas—we ***can be honest*** about our doubts.
Thomas didn't keep his doubts to himself, he was up front about them.
And he boldly asked for a sign—he asked ***to touch*** the hands and side of Jesus for himself,

And what happened? Jesus came to him.
Thomas didn't even need to touch him to understand---he just saw him and instantly cried
out one of the greatest confessions of faith:
My Lord and My God!

Did you know that ***Jeremiah 29:13*** has a great promise for all doubters? It says, *You will
seek me and find me, if you seek me with all your heart!*

How do we seek God with our whole heart?

One important way is to be with ***with other believers***,

In the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We seek God when we come together—and learn from one another—
we can learn from our doubts, and our fears, when we share them.

I know that in my own life, when ***faced with serious doubts*** about the goodness of God,
It's helpful to call upon my Christian friends.

I call up my ***friends*** who are prayer warriors,
and make time to pray with them.

I call up my fellow ***pastors*** and we have lunch and talk about our doubts, and pray
together. I go see my pastor and ***mentor*** and we talk and pray.

It's not enough for me to just doubt and be all alone.

I know that I ***need the company of others who have doubted*** along the way!

I think it's very significant that Jesus appeared to Thomas
in the company of his fellow disciples.

It wasn't when he was all alone,

but when he was with the other believers.

It's in the company of our fellow believers that

Jesus so often breaks into our hearts and lives and helps us to believe.

Sometimes it is the ***fellowship of believers***

that keeps us from giving into our doubts, right?

I mean, how many times has a conversation or a time of worship kept us from going off the
ledge?

How many times have we found what we needed
by ***being with one another?***

What if today, ***Jesus comes to us—***

in the smiles of precious children who know Him,

In the faces of those we are serving,

In the worship we share on Sunday.

I believe we do encounter Jesus today,

and just as he came to Thomas, ***he comes to each one of us***.

It doesn't matter how much we doubt,

Jesus still meets us right where we are,

and so often he comes when we are together.

Remember his words in Matthew 18:20?

Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them!

So *go ahead, and doubt.*

To doubt is not wrong.

For people of faith, doubt is honest, and real.

It's a natural part of faith.

And when we recognize our doubts, may we recognize Jesus—meeting us right where we are.

That is the *Good News* of the Gospel!

Amen.