

Easter 2A – April 12, 2026

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Thomas was an Episcopalian

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

In his book *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out*, the former Franciscan priest Brian Manning confesses:

“When I get honest, I admit I am a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt, I hope and get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty about not feeling guilty, I am trusting and suspicious. I am honest and still I still play games. Aristotle said I am a rational animal; I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer.”¹

How refreshing! Manning is getting real about his faith... a faith that is unwieldy... yet a faith that he holds dearly. Among the many paradoxes of his statement, Manning offers himself as an example of a real flesh and blood human being who exhibits a healthy sense of humility. His raw honesty makes ample room for a faith to grow and evolve. I also love Frederick Beuchner’s comment about faith and doubt. Beucher has said, *“Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep [faith] awake and moving.”*² I find that I am drawn to this kind of messy spirituality because I see my imperfect self as having a place... a home... in a faith realm that makes room for the whole spectrum of human imperfections... warts, wounds, scars and all.

Every year, on the second Sunday of Easter season, we hear the story of Thomas who is often pigeon-holed and maligned as one who doubts. Such a simplification of Thomas’ story can too readily reduce Thomas’ story to a stripped-down conclusion that... doubt is bad... faith is good... with a follow-up conclusion that good Christians must have an unshakable faith in order to be good Christians. Such a stance may serve well... until... one’s life gets turned upside down, one’s heart gets pierced and broken... until one’s once firm understanding of who God is... begins to crack and crumble... or when an encounter with another person’s experience or perspective challenges dearly held beliefs causing us to look again at ideas we have clung to so fiercely. In a 2011 article entitled, “Why Can’t You Just Have More Faith,”³ the late author Rachel Held Evans has written:

¹ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel. Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out* (Sisters, Or: Multnomah Pub. 2005), pg. 23.

² Frederick Beuchner, “Doubt,” October 16, 2016, <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/10/26/doubt>

³ Rachel Held Evans, “Why Can’t You Just Have More Faith,” *Ministry Matters*, July 7, 2011. https://ministrymatters.com/2011-06-07_why_can_t_you_just_have_more_faith/

It's a question often posed to me by well-meaning friends and acquaintances when they learn that occasionally I wake up in the morning unsure if there is a God. [That question is:] Why can't you just have more faith?

With exacerbation in their voice, they urge me to stop reading so much, stop thinking so much, and stop asking so many uncomfortable questions. My doubt, they conclude, reflects a concerted act of rebellion against God that I can start or stop at will. My doubt, they say, would vanish in an instant if I would just pay more attention to all the things God is doing in the world, if I would just have a little more faith.

You may have already surmised that I am firmly in the camp of believing in the power of healthy doubt. I also believe... that there is no one final conclusion, no end point in understanding who God is for us... and that reading varieties of perspectives can both challenge us and inspire us to see God at work in the world. Fresh perspectives and fresh ideas can help infuse new life into our faith understanding. By living consciously in the real world... and using our God-given minds and all of our sense... we can delve into the big questions of faith and doubt... as we prayerfully consider who God is for us in a new moment. Such a stance invites us to go deeper and to let go and release... simplistic ideas that no longer serve our faith understanding. God is forever inviting us to come closer and to say “yes” to the divine love that is forever seeking us. We cannot move closer if we stay firmly planted in one place in our rigid thinking and beliefs.

One of the most famous artistic depictions of Thomas meeting the risen Jesus was painted in 1602 by the Italian artist Caravaggio. This painting is entitled, “The Incredulity of Saint Thomas” ... incredulity being the inability or unwillingness to believe. Was Thomas actually being wayward and stubborn... unable or unwilling to believe... by wanting tangible proof of Jesus’ resurrection? Very important to the message of the painting is that Jesus is actually guiding Thomas’ hand into his side... as we see Thomas’ finger sink into the fleshy wound created by the centurion’s spear... wounds that are evidence of the real, lived experience of human trauma and pain. Jesus has known and lived the full range of human experience. Thomas’ encounter with Jesus’ wounds may well have resonated with Thomas’ own real pain and fresh wound of grief. Clearly, Jesus is patient with Thomas. Thomas had missed out on the first appearance of Jesus in the locked room that had happened a week before. The other disciples had told Thomas what they had experienced when Jesus entered the room and said “Peace be with you.” The others had met Jesus... and they had believed. For Thomas, the reports from others would not suffice. Thomas boldly seeks proof that the Jesus he loves... the one who suffered a cruel death on Good Friday... is indeed alive, as the others had reported. The text doesn’t tell us whether or not Thomas actually did touch the wounds. What we do know is that Thomas is startled by the realization that the one he had loved and grieved is now standing in front of him... alive. Jesus’ living presence, scars and all, resonated with Thomas’ own deep experience of grief and pain... as he announces his own deep recognition: ‘I now see that it is you’... ‘My Lord and my God!’”



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, Caravaggio, 1602

There is an Episcopal meme of Thomas that gets circulated at this time of year when we gather with Jesus and the disciples behind locked doors. A meme is a familiar image with new words to accompany the image adding a humorous twist. The meme image of Jesus reaching out to the awe-stricken Thomas as Jesus says:

“Now, now, Thomas, it’s alright. Confronting doubt can strengthen faith. Two thousand years from now, you’d make a fine Episcopalian.”

The great Episcopal preacher Barbara Brown Taylor confesses the power of her own doubt. In her book *Leaving Church*, Brown has written:

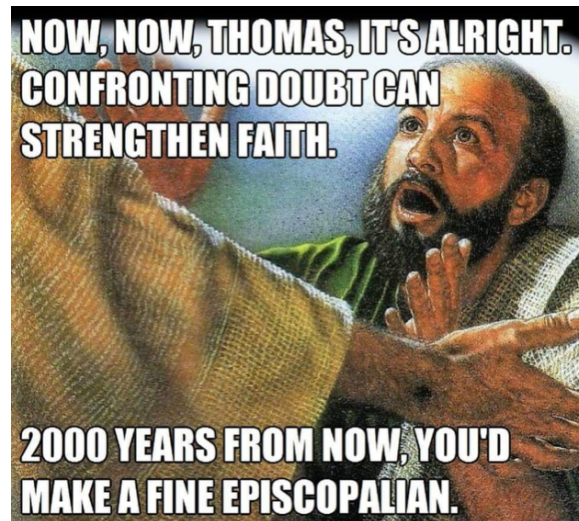
“Doubt often brings me to poke at what I believe, and when it topples, I realize that it was an idol. And so doubt and disillusionment have been the divine gifts that have led me deeper into who God is.”⁴



When I last preached about Thomas, the world was essentially paused by a pandemic. Such a time offered the metaphorical space to delve more deeply into matters of faith and doubt. Back then, there seemed to ample amounts of time to read, study, pray, and ponder a world that was throes of fear, pain, and massive upheaval caused by COVID-19. Back then, the spaciousness of time also offered... opportunities to consider how we would rebuild our world and heal our relationships. The questions I pondered were “Where is God in the enormity of this global situation?” “What does the future hold?” ...and... “Where am I in the greater scheme of things?” In our current moment, the specifics of our situation have changed... but the big questions of faith and doubt remain. Now, as then... we are being invited to use our minds, and all our sense, to prod, to probe, to examine and to discover anew... God’s presence... God’s love... and God’s invitation to deepen in faith and to help heal the wounds that separate us... one from another. God knows, and we know, that there is a lot of work ahead of us.

Images that portray God as a distant, angry, judgmental parent are not really consistent with the Jesus we encounter in the gospels as one who is tender and inviting, one who challenges those around him... one who is brimming with grit and compassion. Our understanding of who God is primarily situated in the person of Jesus.

Frederick Beucher has written: “Jesus is apt to come into the very midst of life at its most real and inescapable. Not in a blaze of unearthly light, not in the midst of a sermon, not in the throes of some kind of religious daydream...”. Jesus comes to us in the midst of our lives... and it is with the whole of our lives, with all we have lived, and all we have been given... that we meet the risen Christ anew.



⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

Jesus showed us bold, conscious love.

As Jesus invited Thomas, so he invites each one of us...

to reach out and explore

to ask the questions and touch the wounds

... to meet the risen one among us...

as we encounter Christ in others

...in the world around us

...and in our deep selves...

so that new life may take root and grow

...as we live into the stunning knowledge

THAT CHRIST IS ALIVE!

...and that God's loving desire for us

...is far more than we can begin to ask for

...or imagine...

Amen...