

Doubt, Faith, Scars, Life

Doubt first entered the pages of scripture in Genesis 3 with the provocation, “*Did God actually say, you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?*” The more Eve debated the serpent, the more doubt multiplied: “*Die? You will not surely die!*” Adam and Eve did not die, but were ostracized from Eden. In the Gospel of Luke, the Angel of God rendered Zechariah mute, unable to speak, for doubting God’s word that he would have a son (1:20). It was only after the child was named John that Zechariah’s tongue was loosened and he began to praise God. In these two examples, doubting God had severe consequences.



In the Gospel of John, however, Jesus accommodates the Apostle Thomas’ doubt and even provides him the proof he needs to believe and come to faith.

Thomas responds, “*My Savior*

and my God!” In another gospel story, we see Peter doubting, too. While on a boat, Peter sees Jesus walking on water, tries to do the same, wavers in faith, and falls. Jesus stretches out his hand to rescue a drowning Peter, and asks him, “*Why did you doubt?*” Later on, those in the boat show great reverence, and confess, “*Truly you are God’s Own!*” (Matthew 14: 31-33). In these narratives, doubt inspires faith.

How then does one navigate the biblical paradox between doubt and faith? Is doubt a threat to faith (like the example of Eden and Zechariah) or (as in the case of Thomas and the disciples in the boat), essential for the very confession of faith?

READING

John 20:19-31

In the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Temple authorities, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Having said this, the savior showed them the marks of crucifixion.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As Abba God has sent me, so I send you.” After saying this, Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive someone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you retain someone’s sins, they are retained.”

It so happened that one of the Twelve, Thomas, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples kept telling him, “We have seen Jesus.” But Thomas said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails, put my finger in the nail marks, and my hand into the spear wound, I will not believe!”

On the eighth day, the disciples were once more in the room, and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus came, even though the doors were locked, and stood before them, saying, “Peace be with you.” Then, addressing Thomas, Jesus said, “Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Don’t persist in your unbelief, but believe!”

Thomas responded, “My Savior and my God!” Jesus said, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus performed many other signs as well – signs not recorded here – in the presence of the disciples. But these have been written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten, and that through this belief you may have life in Jesus’ name.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Are there instances in your life, as an LGBTQ Catholic or ally, where you have doubted God’s promises or the existence of God? How did this make you feel? How did it resolve?
2. When Jesus and the disciples received word that Lazarus was at the point of death, the disciples cautioned Jesus about returning to Judea: “*Only recently, they tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?*” (John 11:8). Thomas, alternatively, spoke up with great loyalty and said, “*Let us go with Jesus, so that we can die with him*” (John 11:16). Where does your loyalty to Jesus shine? As an LGBTQ/ally disciple, what would “*that we can die with him*” mean to you?
3. The label, “*Doubting Thomas*,” seems to have been unjustly stitched onto a person noted for his loyalty, obedience to the Gospel, and faith. Are there instances in your life as an LGBTQ person or ally where you have been mislabeled or misrepresented? How do you rewrite your truth?
4. The closing words of John’s Gospel are, “that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten, and that through this belief you may have life in Jesus’ name.” Many in the LGBTQ community experience daily emotional, psychological, spiritual, or even physical deaths. How have you, or people you know in the LGBTQ community, “resurrected” and found life in Jesus’ name?
5. Even in his resurrected state, Jesus still bore the scars of his crucifixion. We worship a God with scars. Leafing through the pages of scripture, we also encounter diverse biblical characters who fulfilled their divine calling with scars. Job loses everything – his children, wealth, livestock, crops, health and even the relationship of his wife and friends. Many of the psalms highlight David’s cries to

God amidst his struggles. John the Baptist died a horrific death for speaking truth to power. What scars do you carry as an LGBTQ person or ally? How can your scars testify to God's healing and restoration? Who needs to "see or touch" your scars to believe in the saving works or graces of God?

6. Jesus repeats the blessing, "*Peace be with you*" three times in the Gospel. What implication do these words hold for the LGBTQ/ally community, or world, today?

PRAYER to Saint Thomas the Apostle

Glorious Saint Thomas,
your grief for Jesus was such that
it would not let you believe that
God had risen unless you actually
saw and touched the wounds of Christ.

But your love for Jesus was equally great
and it led you to give up your life for the
Gospel.

Pray for us that we may grieve our sins
and help us to spend our lives in God's
service so as to earn the title of "blessed"
which Jesus applied to those who believed
without seeing.

Amen

