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Readings: [http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA\\_RCL/Easter/AEaster2\\_RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster2_RCL.html)

## “Doubt”

Good morning! My name is Sally Ulrey, and I’m the Youth Minister here at St. Matthew’s. Welcome to Youth Sunday, where the youth lead, so they’ll be helping me with the sermon in a bit, too. I hope you’ll be blessed today by our young people. They have so much to offer this parish, so thanks for giving them a chance to serve and thanks for supporting them.

Today’s topic is about Doubt. Doubt kinda gets a bad rap. Especially in Christian circles, it can feel like a bad word. I watched a video of a kid who, at his church, admitted he had doubts about the Bible, and literally everyone physically leaned away from him, and stared around with wide-eyes as if to say, “What do we do??”

Doubt often makes us uncomfortable. Both when we doubt, and when others do. Uncertainty is uncomfortable. I read an article that said Christians have lost the ability to doubt properly. Because doubt is not the enemy of faith, it’s a part of it. We all experience it. Thomas gets a bad rap for doubting, but we could actually learn a lot from his example.

Thomas missed out on this incredible experience where the Resurrected Jesus revealed Himself to all his friends, but not him. He got left out. Everyone else had this meaningful experience that transformed their faith, and he missed it! So what does he do when he’s left in the dark, when he doesn’t get to yet SEE who Jesus is? Well, he keeps coming. He keeps showing up. The next time they meet, Thomas is THERE. He continues to be a part of that community, and the community continues to welcome him even though he expressed his doubts. They are ok with a “doubter,” someone who isn’t 100% sure, but is honestly seeking. And Thomas just keeps coming, doubts and all. I love that!

Do you know that in MANY of the resurrection stories where Jesus appeared to the disciples, it was when they were worshipping together in community, specifically sharing Eucharist? That’s when they experienced Jesus in the most profound way.

So when in doubt, stay in community.

Thomas’s statement may seem like a rejection of the risen Christ (“unless I see, I won’t believe), but really, I hear in it an invitation: “God, reveal yourself to me!” He was an honest seeker. Jesus said, “Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find.” And so Thomas ASKED that God would reveal Himself. That’s a prayer God LOVES to answer.

When in doubt, Thomas:

- 1) Stayed in community
- 2) Was an honest seeker...kept an open mind
- 3) Invited God to reveal Himself...he asked for what he needed, asked God to meet him

What does God do with Thomas’s doubt? How does God respond? God isn’t threatened. God doesn’t turn away. God draws near to him. But God does it in God’s own time...which might have felt like an eternity to Thomas. But God DOES answer his prayer. Jesus meets him where he is, and offers to let him touch His scars, offering Thomas exactly what he asked for.

*“Doubt” by Sally Ulrey  
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When Jesus met Thomas, even in his doubt, it was transformative. Thomas is the first to declare this statement about Jesus, “My Lord and My God!” The first disciple to call Jesus God. So all those doubts and wonderings about if Jesus could REALLY be resurrected...and if he really had been resurrected, what that would mean about who He was???.... All those questions and wonderings really were putting the framework in place for a profound theological conviction. That Jesus is Lord and God.

Jesus tells Thomas that he appeared to Thomas so that he would believe and not doubt. Thomas’s doubt had a purpose. The purpose of doubt is belief. Going through that period of doubt actually helped Thomas in his belief. Doubt is not the end of the story. Belief is. Doubt refines belief.

Doubt is not a lack of faith. I think doubt is actually what exposes the presence of faith. You can’t have doubts unless there’s something there to doubt, unless there’s faith there, even just a little bit. And even if it’s the size of a mustard seed, Jesus says that’s enough.

Doubt can also lead to a renewed or strengthened faith. Seasons of doubt lead us to solidify what we believe.

Here are some youth to share with you their stories about faith and doubt.

**Matthew Maneol**

*Earlier, Sally talked about how even though Thomas never experienced what the other disciples experienced and he was left out, he kept coming back to his community and his community continued to accept him even though he was expressing doubts. When I first started coming to youth group in middle school, I honestly wasn’t too into it. I was younger, and never really had my own opinions of faith. I would just come because my sister Libby was going. She was a leader in youth group and was very involved; meanwhile, I was just kinda there. She had reached a point where her relationship with Christ was much more developed than mine was, and that was the experience I was missing out on. Because my sister was so sure about her relationship with Christ and was so involved, it gave me doubts about my own faith. But it was a gradual process, and I would always come back, and I was always welcomed with big smiles all the way down the dinner tables to the kitchen where the parent chef of the night had good, warm food waiting for me. Fast forward a couple years later, and I feel that I have reached the same point in faith that my sister was at. When I used to just be going through the motions. Even just recently, when Sally asked me to write something for the sermon this Sunday, I was all for it, because this was something I WANTED to do. I am MUCH more involved that I used to be, and I know that my relationship with Christ is as strong as ever.*

## **Blair Rector**

*Three years ago, in the beginning of my freshmen year, I made a decision that drastically changed my life in extraordinary ways. My best friend asked me to come with her to this volleyball camp at Grayson High School. I looked at her with confusion, and I laughed. But she didn't laugh back. I realized that she was being serious, and concern rushed through my head. In my mind, there was absolutely no way that a 5 foot, 90 lb girl could play an extremely competitive sport that is known to consist of tall, strong-built players. Doubt consumed me, and I believed that I wasn't capable of playing volleyball. My best friend reassured me and told me she just wanted something to do during the summer, so I hesitantly agreed to go. That night I prayed to God and I asked him to guide me in the right path. I asked that he would lead me to make the right decisions, and reluctantly he did.*

*My best friend and I attended camp every single day, and I soon became extremely attached to the sport. I caught on to the techniques quickly, and the coaches were beginning to notice me. After a couple days of the camp, I strongly encouraged all my friends to come as well. They saw my strong passion and dedication, and they eagerly started coming as well. For the rest of the summer, I was having the time of my life. As summer neared to an end, tryouts became my top priority. I was determined to make the team, but one night, that all changed. Around 1 am on a Tuesday night, I was suffering in agonizing pain in my lower back. My mom rushed me to the hospital, and fear rushed through my head. As I was sitting in the hospital bed, waiting for the doctor to come see me, my only concern was volleyball. I was scared that I would never be able to touch foot on the court again. The doctor eventually walked in, and she said I needed a cat scan. After the cat scan, the doctor told me I had kidney stones. She reassured me that this would not affect me playing volleyball, and I grinned from cheek to cheek. I thanked God for not letting it be worse. After a week of medicine and doctor appointments, I went back to volleyball and prepared for tryouts.*

*When tryouts finally arrived, my friends and I were consumed with unimaginable fear. As the days of tryouts passed, my friends were gradually getting cut. By the last day of tryouts, all of my friends were cut, and there was only me and a few strangers left. Even though I was scared of being alone and without friends, I played to my best ability because I knew I still wanted this. Later that day, I constantly kept refreshing the volleyball page to see if I made the team. Finally around 9:00 pm, the list was posted. My name, along with 11 other females, was listed in bold. I screamed with joy, and I became hopeful for my future.*

*My life was changed forever, and I am truly thankful that God helped guide me in this path. I experienced an unreasonable amount of doubt and conquered some of my worst challenges, yet with God's help, I persevered and succeeded. Just like Thomas, I completely doubted what was right in front of me, but if it wasn't for my determination and God's assistance, I wouldn't be where I am today. I made extraordinary, new friends and memories that I would never wish to forget. God has truly blessed me, and I will be forever thankful that I was able to conquer my doubt.*

### **Derek Kiddoo**

*Hey, I'm Derek, the guy that's ALWAYS here. I've been here most weeks for around 16 years but I've never really gotten into the "church spirit". I was just kinda there, I never really payed attention to the service and I never really felt like an Episcopalian, like I was just going through the motions. It went on that way for a while and I did get better about that as I got older and matured I still felt like I was going through the motions. I was constantly doubting my faith and while I got boosts during this time they were either so miniscule that they made no difference or they faded quickly due to the busyness and stress of life. That is until last year when I made significant progress, starting with the Pilgrimage. It just felt so special, more so than other similar events like New Beginnings. It has always stuck with me and even now, almost a year later I can remember so much so vividly, like it happened last month. From there things took off, and this last year has just kept the train going. I feel like my faith has grown more this year than it has every other year combined. It's kinda funny; people say that Jesus being crucified is ironic while Doubting Thomas has positive irony. His doubt actually made his faith stronger when he did believe and I am blessed to be the same.*

### **Josh Hurst**

*None of our faiths are perfect, for whatever reason, we all have our doubts. That whisper in our ear. But we all fight, in some way, we all have some little moments that fortify our faith. Moments that we cling to, and never forget.*

*For me, that moment came when I was around 6 or 7 years old. I was lying bed trying, to sleep, and terrified of, something. I can't remember what, but I was really scared. So I said a little prayer, asking God to wipe away the fear. And It worked, I wasn't afraid anymore. It was just, washed away. I distinctly remember not expecting that to happen.*

*And that stuck with me, through all the trials and doubts I have in my life, I always remember that night. And yes, I was just a little kid afraid of the dark, but I knew what it meant then, and I still know what it means now.*

*I had my doubts about whether God was with me. But I've never forgotten how He showed himself to me.*

Thank you, youth, for sharing your stories. Stories about God's work in our lives are part of what helps us all to believe. Even though none of us ever SAW Jesus in bodily form like the apostles did, Jesus did leave us with their stories. So our faith is not a totally blind faith. We are left with the eye-witness testimonies of those who did see. And it says those stories were written that we might believe. Thank you, youth, for offering your stories, that we might believe.

So when in doubt, what do you do?

Well...

- Like Matthew, keep being a part of community, and let that community love you and welcome you and feed you.
- Like Blair, when you can't always SEE how it's going to work out, you hold onto HOPE that God is leading and guiding you.
- Like Derek, you just keep showing up. Week after week after week. You stay faithful.
- Like Josh, you ASK. Josh didn't expect his prayer to be answered, but he asked anyway. That takes faith!

Doubt is not the enemy of faith. Its purpose is to refine and strengthen faith. Jesus DIDN'T say "Blessed are those who don't doubt and just believe", he said "Blessed are those who haven't SEEN, and yet believe". We will all have times when we can't SEE how a hard situation will work out. That's an opportunity to exercise faith (even if it's faith with doubts), because faith is when we hold on to HOPE, that God is with us, that God is working on our behalf when we're in the dark, and we can't SEE how it's going to be ok. We can't SEE, but we HOPE. That's faith. You can't see. You may have doubts. But you still have hope.

So I invite you now to reflect on doubt and faith and sight...both the hard times and the good times... the times when you've experienced doubts or questions, the times God has revealed Himself to you, the times when you've not been able to SEE how God was there or was working, and the times when that became more clear.

Our ushers are passing out little pieces of blindfolds. These are to remind you that we can't always SEE God and how God is working and caring for us. On the blindfold is the verse, "blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe", which should serve as a reminder that when we can't SEE what's going on, when we're not sure, when we doubt, that it's an opportunity for faith and for growth.

After the service, on your way out, you'll find some sharpies. As you reflect on your own experiences with faith and doubt and not being able to see and how God has been revealed to you, you are invited to write something that symbolizes the situations you are going through or have gone through when you couldn't see how God was working...it was hard to see it. Or the questions or the doubts that you have now or have had. Or even the ways that you invited God to reveal Himself to you.

And once you have done that, take your blindfold home as a reminder.

I'd like to close with some "Beatitudes" written based on this passage:

Blessed are those who haven't seen, yet believe.

Blessed are the ones who ask, for they will receive.

Blessed are the ones who seek, for they will find.

Blessed are the doubters, for their faith may be strengthened.

Blessed are the ones who can't see God, for they have the opportunity to hold onto hope and grow in faith.

Blessed are the ones who feel they are in the darkness, for light is dawning.

Blessed are the ones who feel far away, for God is coming near.

Blessed are the ones who stay in community during doubt, for they will be carried.

Blessed are the ones who left testimonies of what they did see, that we may believe.

Blessed are we who tell our stories of doubt and faith, that others might believe as well.

Blessed be God, who loves the doubters, meets them where they are, and reveals Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.