

Growing up, I attended Catholic school, taught by Dominican sisters. They had a way of bringing Scripture into everyday life—sometimes in ways that were memorable, honest, sharp, and humorous.

They would use biblical names as adjectives to describe their students. If your grades suddenly improved, you were called “Lazarus,” because it was as if your grades had risen from the dead. If you showed kindness and hospitality and helped the lunch ladies clean up, you were a “Martha.” These kinds of names were not limited to their students. The sisters were big baseball fans, and when Johnny Damon left the Boston Red Sox to play for the New York Yankees, I think I heard the word “Judas” thrown around in my 3rd grade class more times than I could count. But perhaps the most common and most lasting label of all, that I’m sure all of you have probably heard once before, is: “Doubting Tom or Thomas” A name given to anyone who hesitates, anyone who questions, or anyone who needs to see before they can believe. In the Gospel, we meet Thomas who is honest, searching, and unwilling to pretend a faith he does not yet feel. He tells the others “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.” When Christ comes to him, he is not met with scorn, but with compassion. Thomas is invited closer. His doubt becomes the doorway to a deeper faith. It’s important to remember, too, that this is not the whole of Thomas’s story. Earlier in John’s Gospel, when Jesus decides to return to Bethany where Lazarus had died and where there was real danger, because those in power were already seeking to harm him it is Thomas who says to the other disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Even then, Thomas shows a deep and courageous faith in who Jesus is. As he is willing to die with Jesus- that is how much faith he contained before the crucifixion. And so his doubt is not the absence of faith, it is the struggle of someone who has already given his heart, now trying to make sense of something unimaginable. After witnessing the brutality of the crucifixion, the suffering, the finality of death can we really blame him for thinking there is no way anyone could return from that? And in some ways, Thomas is at an unfair disadvantage. The other disciples have already seen the risen Christ. Yet even they were not free from fear or doubt. John tells us the doors were locked when Jesus first came among them they were hiding, afraid, uncertain of what might happen next. Before Jesus spoke peace, there was fear. When I was an elementary school teacher, I loved reading to my students *The Polar Express*, written by Chris Van Allsburg. In that story, it echoes a similar encounter that we see in Thomas. In *The Polar Express*, a young boy hears the sound of a mysterious bell on Christmas Eve, a bell that only those who truly believe can hear. As the boy grows older, many around him lose the ability to hear the bell. Not because the bell has stopped ringing, but because something within them has quieted. There is even a moment in the story where the boy begins to wonder if seeing is what makes something real. He looks for proof, for something he can hold onto. And yet, what he comes to discover is that the truest things cannot always be confirmed by sight. The bell continues to ring not because it can be proven, but because it is received. He learns, slowly and quietly, that believing is not rooted in

what the eyes can verify, but in what the heart is willing to trust. Thomas says, “I must see to believe.” But the risen Christ gently turns that around: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” The bell in the story reminds us of this truth—the most important things are not proven by sight or touch alone. They are known in the heart. In our Episcopal tradition, we hold space for both doubt and wonder. Faith is not the absence of questions, but the courage to remain open—to listen for the bell, even when the world tells us it has gone silent. Like Thomas, we are invited to come close. Like the child in the story, we are invited to believe not because we see but because we can feel it. Yesterday, Violet, an 8th grader and I had our last confirmation session before she is confirmed, and with her permission I wanted to share what she expressed to me about faith.

She noted in our conversation: “We live in a world where people need to see proof and evidence to believe in something. That’s why some people don’t believe in God, because we cannot see God. However, sometimes seeing can be harder to believe—if you see something but do not feel it. When we feel God in us and around us, we do not need the proof of seeing, for the feeling we receive can sometimes be more than what sight provides for us to believe.” What Violet names for us is the very space where Thomas and that small silver bell meet—the place where faith moves from the eyes to the heart. Thomas thought he needed to see, yet what he ultimately received was an encounter. The boy hears the bell not because he can prove it, but because he remains open to wonder. And so faith is not about having all the evidence laid before us, but about recognizing the presence of God stirring within us, even when we cannot point to it. It is there, in that quiet inner knowing, that doubt and belief are no longer opposites, but companions on the same journey guiding us toward a deeper trust, a more honest faith, and a love that we may not always see, but can truly know. And we remember, too, that Thomas does not remain in doubt. When he encounters the risen Christ, he makes one of the most profound proclamations in all of Scripture: “My Lord and my God.” In that moment, his questioning gives way not just to belief, but to a deep and personal faith a reminder that those who wrestle with doubt are often the very ones who come to know Christ most fully. And perhaps, if we listen carefully, we will hear it—the clear, steady ringing of grace, like bells within our hearts. And when we receive Communion this morning, may we be reminded that we, like Thomas, are invited to touch the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven, with His presence made real to us in the Eucharist, and to trust in the Resurrection of our Lord.- Amen.