



Faith *Doubt & Fear*

NAYIRI KARJIAN, GENERAL MINISTER, LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION, OHIO NORTHEAST, UCC • APRIL 8, 2021

We see Thomas, known as the doubter, in the Gospel of John first when the news of the death of Lazarus arrives and Jesus suggests that they go to him, to Judea. The disciples try to persuade Jesus to change his mind since his life would be in jeopardy, for “some sought to stone him to death.” But when Jesus insists, it is Thomas who does not want Jesus to go alone, and says – *let us all go, so we may die with him*. Don’t these words of Thomas convey care and devotion, not doubt and suspicion?

On another occasion after the Passover meal Jesus tells the disciples that he will be leaving them, but “*Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you...And you know the way where I am going...*” Thomas interrupts saying, *but we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?* Jesus says, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life...*” The next time we see Thomas he is questioning Jesus’ resurrection saying, *unless I see him with my own eyes and touch him, I won’t believe...*

Thomas can be a doubter and a cynic, he can also be inquisitive and thoughtful, a man with reasonable curiosity seeking to make sense of things he cannot comprehend. And, he is not the only one! The biblical story is full of people like Thomas who ask questions, who doubt, lament and struggle, who seek answers to difficult questions. One of the joys and frustrations of being human is that we have an urge to seek meaning and to make sense out of things. Our brains perceive, gather information, associate, categorize, prioritize, remember, and put things in order. If and when things do not make sense we struggle and flounder. It follows that especially when it comes to faith, doubt is very much a part of it.

The word *doubt* from Old French is closely related to Latin *dubius*, *dubious* in English, based on *duo* two, meaning ‘*wavering between two possibilities.*’ Considering all possibilities is usually a sign of thoughtful discernment. Weighing the options is generally prudent. Only the thoughtless do not consider all options, and only the unthinking do not question. Questioning/questioning is the mark of a thinking person, and doubt is part of the process.

The word *faith* finds its root in the Latin *fide*, *fidelity*, *faithfulness*, based on *trust*. Faith, then is really about *trust* which makes its opposite not doubt but fear. If one has faith, one trusts. Faith helps us trust the One who is in charge, the One who Loves and is Love. When one trusts one cannot be afraid. Perhaps that is why Jesus often said – *be no afraid*. Faith and fear do not belong together, while faith and doubt are often intertwined.

In fact, all three – faith, doubt and fear have a complex relationship. We humans find it difficult to trust, for we often want to be in charge and in control, unwilling to let go. But faith is trusting in the midst of fear, it is holding on in the midst of doubt and anxiety. Faith is about trusting that all will be well no matter the circumstances, as we hear Jesus say, *do not be afraid but trust*. For it is exactly in fear and doubt that we need faith and trust.

Thomas can be a good example of someone whose faith struggled to make sense of things. So, ask questions, explore, seek, and doubt considering all options, and like Thomas you will discover the Risen Christ within and around you cheering you on to continue to grow in faith and trust.