

## **Peace in the Midst of Doubt**

1 John 1:1-7

John 20: 19-31

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### *1 John 1:1-7*

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

### *John 20: 19-31*

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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Our Gospel reading tells the well-known story of the disciple who has come to be known as Doubting Thomas. The words are said together as though that was his given name. Doubting Thomas. A forever judgement, a conviction and a verdict, are his legacy. The one who could only believe what he could see with his own eyes and touch with his own hands. We hear the phrase, ‘don’t be a doubting Thomas,’ as an encouragement and urging to believe by faith alone, to just accept what we cannot fully understand. To doubt is considered believing that for God not

all things are possible. We freely use the term for anyone who is a skeptic, who refuses to believe without direct personal experience

But look who else is there, who has also been hiding, been locked away in a room and living in fear, who stayed safe as Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome had the courage to go to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body that morning, until they were so terrified and amazed at the empty tomb and the messenger, that they told no one. Simon Peter, the Rock on whom Jesus said he would build his church is the one who three times denied knowing him, denied being a follower<sup>i</sup>. It had been Peter, John and James who could not stay awake and keep watch in those crucial moments as Jesus prayed with deep anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he was arrested.<sup>ii</sup> Matthew the dishonest tax collector had been redeemed by Jesus, had his life turned around, yet he fled rather than bearing witness or offering moral support. All eleven of the disciples, including Jesus' own brother James, abandoned Jesus as he endured arrest, mock trials, and the painfully breathless death by crucifixion.

There is Doubting Thomas, and there are also Silent Marys and Salome, Denying Peter, Sleeping James and John, Fleeing Matthew, Abandoning Andrew, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot.

It is Resurrection Sunday evening, and in fear of the authorities and their own likely fate, in grief and confusion, they hide from the outside world, from the horrors that the men had witnessed from a great distance, or even second-hand, on Friday. They are overwhelmed by dashed hopes and shattered expectations. Perhaps there is even regret and shame at their denial, their sleepiness, their running away, as fear and anger compelled and pushed every one of them greater and stronger than their love for their teacher, their friend.

All of their behaviors, all of their reactions, all of their hiding and trembling and fear, are all forms of doubt. Thomas does not have a lock, a monopoly, on being a doubting disciple. Every one of the disciples was a doubter. Not one of the disciples acted as though Jesus had told them three times that he would experience great suffering, be killed and rise again three days later.<sup>iii</sup> They had heard Jesus' words, words that were literal, clear and direct, words that were not vague or tangled in a parable. Peter had even rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing.<sup>iv</sup>

One of the most perplexing things about the Easter story is that Jesus' own disciples just didn't get it. All the way up to --and even beyond-- Jesus' resurrection, his disciples—who had traveled, studied, and ministered under Jesus for most of his public ministry—seem remarkably confused about what's happening.<sup>v</sup>

They had been forewarned yet they still doubted when it did all happen exactly as Jesus had said it would. They had seen him work many life-giving miracles, even some life-returning miracles, but the disciples just could not bring themselves to believe Jesus' most dramatic claim—that he would die and rise from the grave.

Yet on Easter night, suddenly through locked doors and shuttered windows, the resurrected Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

"Peace be with you."

A loving, warm, gentle, encouraging greeting. A greeting of forgiveness, of understanding, of lovingkindness.

There were no words of anger at being deserted, no resentment at being denied, no bitterness at having been doubted.

"Peace be with you." The resurrected Jesus offered peace in place of fear, in place of grief, in place of doubt. Right into the midst of all of their doubts, the Risen Christ brought peace.

The remarkable and comforting fact is that some of Jesus' first disciples, who personally saw and heard so many amazing things, doubted. Is it any surprise that we also experience a wavering, hesitant uncertainty, questioning and doubt about what we believe, about what we have been taught?

Aren't all of us doubters at one time or another? Don't we look at the centuries old conflicts in the mid-East, the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity and Islam and wonder why that is and without any end in sight? Don't we pray and work for ways of acceptance, inclusion and equity for all of God's children, yet exclusion, hatred and disparity abound? Don't we 'give it to God' as a loved one struggles with illness or addiction or dangerous behavior, yet the situation only grows larger? Don't we wonder sometimes if the resurrection really changed the world after all?

We receive reassurance, comfort and encouragement, and yes even Christ's peace, through the disciples' doubts. Like the disciples, we don't always understand what God is doing in our lives. We hear God's clear promises, yet can collapse into stress and anxiety and doubt when life gets difficult and challenging. We hide away from what is hard to face, what we are struggling with.

"Peace be with you."

In *Resurrection Doubts*, David Lose says that "doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt, in fact, is probably a necessary ingredient to faith. Faith, by definition, is trust in spite of a lack of evidence. Faith is not knowledge. Faith is more tension-filled. It is acting as if something is true even when you have no proof that it is. Doubt is in fact, probably a requirement of faith. Because, honestly, in light of all the death and trauma and disappointment and tragedy that colors every human life, if you don't have at least some difficulty believing the promise that God not only raised one person, Jesus, from the dead, but also promises new life and second chances and forgiveness and grace to all, then you're probably not paying attention. So as we gather to worship, as we talk about the "gathering of the faithful," we're not talking about the gathering of those who's faith is absolute or certain or bedrock. We're talking about those people who have all kinds of questions and doubts but still find joy and wonder in this message of good news about new life."<sup>vi</sup>

This awareness and acceptance of our questions and our doubts entwined with our joy and our wonder as we gather for worship is exactly why among our opening words we greet one another with are the peace of Christ.

God makes peace within us. Let us claim it.

God makes peace between us. Let us share it

May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts as we greet one another in peace.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Lk 22:54-62

<sup>ii</sup> Mt 26: 36-46

<sup>iii</sup> Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32 and 10:32-34

<sup>iv</sup> Mk 8: 32

<sup>v</sup> Andy Rau ~ <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2012/04/the-disciples-who-didnt-get-it/>

<sup>vi</sup> David Lose ~ <https://www.davidlose.net/2015/04/easter-3-b-resurrection-doubts/>