

When my sister and I were growing up, we used to play with our friends a card game. Although growing up in Boston area, we called it a card game that was named I doubt it. And it was a game of bluffing. With the object to rid yourself of your cards, you went around in a circle putting down from one to four aces, then twos, then threes, then fours. Honesty was certainly not necessary.

00:28:50

Two aces, I would say putting down two cards, which might or might not be aces. If nobody shouted out, I doubt it. I was two cards closer to winning. And if somebody doubted me and I had been fibbing, I had to pick up the whole pile in the center. And if somebody doubted me and I was telling the truth, that person had to pick up up the whole pile.

00:29:15

Now, with that card game as well as with the more popular bluffing card game, poker, doubt is part of the fun and excitement. But in our day to day relationships, I don't think that doubt brings us much fun or excitement. It frankly usually adds a lot of anxiety to our lives.

00:29:41

Doubt and worry seem to go hand in hand. We may doubt our ability to be successful at school or at work, and so we worry. We may doubt our financial security, and so we worry some more. We may doubt the love and fidelity of friends or spouse, and then we worry even more. And we may doubt that God really loves us as much as our church and the Bible teach us.

00:30:16

And so we are insecure in our faith and our relationship with fellow Christians, fearful of the future and frankly, scared silly of death.

00:30:29

Now, sometimes even in the scenarios I just mentioned, doubt can be a good thing, a warning sign, perhaps a sign that you might have to make some changes in your life. If we worry about money, we may indeed be living beyond our means and need to reevaluate our budget and our spending. If we worry about school or work success, well, maybe we're in a career or a preparation for a career that doesn't quite match all our skills and gifts and abilities. And an evaluation of that might be in order.

00:31:05

Friends and spouses can and do fail us. And if the talk doesn't, if the walk doesn't match the talk, then maybe we have reason to doubt their fidelity. And when God seems far away or even silent, maybe that is A movement of the

Holy Spirit urging us to come closer to, in the words of St. Paul, to the church at Corinth to find a more excellent way.

00:31:40

This morning we're going to look at the concept of doubt. And we're going to look at it through a look at a man whose claim to fame. Fame is that he is the origin of the phrase a doubting Thomas. Thomas appears in conversation three times in John's Gospel. The third time being our gospel passage for today that was just read.

00:32:00

We're going to look at the other two times first to get a little bit better idea of who Thomas is. And in doing that, we may find that Thomas is more like us or we're more like him than we might care to admit. The first passage comes from John 11, and I'm going to summarize it for you. Beginning at verse one, we discover that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, took sick, very sick. And so the women sent for Jesus, expecting him to come right away because they were such good friends.

00:32:37

But Jesus stayed two more days where he was with the disciples. And then he suggested to the disciples that they all go back to Judea. Now the disciples reply with the equivalent of huh? Are you nuts? The authorities have been trying to get at you and arrest you here.

00:32:56

They'll do that and more if we go there. So Jesus response is, is to tell them, because he knows that by now Lazarus has died. Is to tell them that Lazarus has fallen asleep and he wants to go and wake him up. Now that metaphor for death flies completely over the heads of the clueless disciples. So Jesus has to tell them very plainly, Lazarus has died.

00:33:22

I want to go there and to be with the family. Then at verse 16 in 17, we have a one sentence mention of Thomas. Thomas, who was called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him. I wonder how Thomas actually spoke those words. Was his remark made sarcastically?

00:33:50

Right, sure. Let's all go up there to Judea and we'll all end up just like Lazarus, dead. Or was he speaking boldly and forthrightly? Okay, men, let's go. We'll go with Jesus wherever he wants, whatever the consequences may be.

00:34:10

Either way, Thomas seems to have absolutely no doubt about what will happen. There is trouble ahead. Yet Thomas at this moment, moment is courageously willing to follow Jesus. How that will all change when faced with the reality of crucifixion.

00:34:34

Do we ever think that we have counted the cost of being a disciple? Have we ever proclaimed our willingness to take up our cross to do what Jesus would have us do, to follow him in our jobs, our school, our community, our family. Only to discover that when the heat is on and the difficult decisions face us, that we too flee.

00:35:06

The next time we hear Thomas speak is in the 14th chapter of John. The disciples and Jesus are gathered for their final meal together. And Jesus has just told them that one of them is going to betray him. Then he gives these familiar words of encouragement to them. Hear these words.

00:35:26

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you?

00:35:42

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I'm going. Thomas, here he comes now. Says to Jesus, lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?

00:36:08

And Jesus replies, I am the way and the truth and the life. Thomas again, the realist, concrete thinker. Jesus. Just a minute, please. Excuse me.

00:36:24

In case you've forgotten, you've told us nothing about where we're going after supper tonight. How can we possibly know the way to this place where you're planning to go?

00:36:37

Jesus actually had told them several times the way he was going to go. It was the way of suffering, the way of the cross, the way of death. They had heard, but they had not understood. Jesus could also have phrased it this Thomas, this is not about an itinerary, a set of directions to a place in this world or the next. It's about a relationship with a relationship with me that enables a true way of living because it connects you with the creator of the universe.

00:37:22

Have we ever looked for a set of directions, a list of do's and don'ts by which we may order our lives and be assured of a place in God's favor?

00:37:36

Have we ever thought, well, if God would only just spell it out for me and I would know exactly how to relate and be in pretty good terms with the Lord, but maybe still have some room to do what I want to do. Jesus replies, come know me. Together we will travel this life with its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs, the pain of the cross and the glory of resurrection.

00:38:11

The third encounter with Thomas. Thomas comes after the resurrection and is our gospel passage for today. According to John, Mary Magdalene had told the disciples that she had seen Jesus, that indeed he is alive. The other disciples, apparently accepting the cultural opinion that women were not necessarily legitimate witnesses, were fearfully gathered behind locked doors. Thomas, for whatever reason, was elsewhere that day.

00:38:46

Jesus appears to the disciples, showing them his hands and his side. Yes, they realize he is alive, but when they excitedly tell Thomas the good news, he is skeptical. Thomas Evra, the straight shooting realist, says, no way, guys. You're imagining things. To see his hands and feet might be good enough for all of you, but for me, I've actually got to touch him in those places in order for me to believe.

00:39:26

An entire week passes before Thomas gets that chance. I wonder what that week was like for Thomas and for the disciples. Did they keep up their joy or did Thomas Doubt cause them to reconsider what they had seen? They were still behind shut doors when Jesus appears to them. And Jesus, aware of Thomas Doubt and need for concrete proof, kindly says to Thomas, here.

00:40:03

Here are my hands. Here is my side. Come and touch. Take that action that will, if we translate the Greek, more literally, turn you from an unbeliever to a believer.

00:40:19

You know, we don't know if time Thomas actually did touch Jesus. We sort of assume so. And we've seen all these paintings by magnificent artists that show Thomas touching Jesus in those areas, but the text doesn't specifically say that he did. Yet with that encounter, however it ultimately played out, Thomas was a changed man.

00:40:46

Some find faith possible without additional sight. Jesus calls these people happy, blessed. Some of us need more proof before we believe. Jesus loved Thomas enough that he was willing to meet Thomas where he was. And he loves you and me enough that he is willing to meet us exactly where we are today.

00:41:16

Just as he knew Thomas need, He knows your need and he knows my need. And he invites us to come and touch him, to believe, to receive his forgiveness, his peace, to learn of him. For he is humble and meek and lowly of heart. And we will find, when joined to Jesus, rest for our souls, hope for our lives, strength for the journey and life everlasting. Jesus calls us today, as did the psalmist of old, to taste and see that the Lord is good.

00:42:01

Happy are those who find refuge in Him. We can come to use the words of the old hymn, Just as I am. Though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt. Will he turn us away? I doubt it.

00:42:26

In the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

00:42:37