

**No Doubt About It!©****John 20:19-31; Revelation 1:4-8****Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**

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How has your week gone, Easter People? Have you been filled with joy and peace after the long Lenten Season and dark Holy Week? After the joyful Easter service with this place crowded with family and friends – have you been joyful? Have you “kept the feast” – that Resurrection Hope in your hearts as you went about your daily lives?

I hope your week has been full of joy and peace, but the reality is likely to be that you’ve had some normal frustrations and fears that match any other time of the year.

Reality has a way of rising up and slapping us in the face, doesn’t it? We still have bills to pay; work to do; relationship issues; news to hear – life to live.

No doubt about it – life goes on and sometimes it’s a struggle to keep that Easter peace. Maybe you feel that the alleluias we sang last week aren’t ringing quite as loudly or joyfully this week.

Which is why I think Thomas is a good one for us to consider. Poor Thomas has gotten a bad rap through the years, if you ask me. Really, if you had been there after seeing Jesus die a real death on a horrific cross, and you had seen him taken down and sealed into that tomb, wouldn’t you have wanted to see for yourself that he was alive?

It was the same thing the others had seen. That was the reason they had come to believe, because the risen Lord had come to them. No one, before seeing Jesus, believed he had risen. No one even seemed to remember that he said he would rise from the dead.

They all had doubts when the women came and said the tomb was empty, or that they had seen Jesus alive (depending on which gospel ending you read). Thomas was not the only one with doubts.

Perhaps Thomas is not so much a doubter as he is a realist, and I think we can all relate to that. Don’t we have some difficulty believing certain things we can’t see or prove? Especially today, with so much scientific data, I think it is even harder to believe some things.

David Lose, who of my favorite commentators, writes about this. He suggests maybe doubt is not the opposite of faith, but actually, part of it, maybe even an essential part of it.

Maybe, rather than Jesus' rebuking Thomas for his doubt, Jesus understands it, which is why he comes back and offers, without being asked, for Thomas to put his finger in the holes where the nails and the sword had been.

When Jesus then says, "Blest are those who have not seen, yet still come to believe!" maybe he is saying it with great love and understanding.

Without a doubt Jesus is blessing all believers throughout the generations to come, all the way up to ours, and beyond.

Those who have managed to believe without having the benefit that Thomas and the other disciples had are blessed for coming to the faith that is sometimes difficult.

I believe Jesus was resurrected. I believe he lives today. But, without a doubt, if I had a choice of whether to believe by seeing Jesus, or not, I would choose to see him. I would choose to touch him and see his face and hear his voice.

But that isn't usually the way faith is. Faith is believing, even when we cannot see. But it's also accepting and admitting to things we have doubts about. Doubt can be good if we allow it to cause us to wrestle with it, to enter the struggle and search for the answers.

Of course, we can choose to not go any further than our doubt. We can just say, I doubt that is true and then not try any more. So, in that case, doubt wins and we don't grow in our faith.

To be Easter People, we don't have to wait until all our doubts are worked out, all our questions are answered; we don't have to hide our doubts. We come in spite of them, believing, alongside some doubt.

We come with faith that the ministry we do is not in vain. We don't have to have everything figured out before we come to worship, or to show compassion or care in the name of the one we follow. We trust that this is our call – to carry out the mission given by Christ.

And we come open to the Holy Spirit, because so often when we doubt something, and we ask God to show us the truth, somehow, faith begins to grow inside our hearts for that very thing we doubt.

Or, we are able to work out in our minds that, while we may not quite be there in believing certain things, over all, we know deep down that the message of the good news of Jesus' resurrection is true. No doubt about it!

And what is the main message of the resurrection? That God loves us. That through God's Son, Jesus Christ, we are forgiven, we are God's beloved, we have the promise of eternal life and we have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us, guiding us, comforting us, helping us to know that this message is true.

All through Lent and Holy Week we were blessed with sharing and hearing faith stories. Some told about life changing, transforming things in their lives when they made a commitment to Christ.

Some told about a particular thing that happened that caused them to believe God's hand was in that event.

And we heard a faith story about struggles and doubt, which I immensely appreciated because, in reality, I think that story is not unusual, but is very much the norm for many – including those who tell, with confidence, their other stories of faith.

I have a strong belief that, as we continue sharing and talking about our faith – and where we have experienced the living Christ – and also sharing about our places of doubt – where we struggle and wrestle with what we believe – I do believe we all grow. We all help one another to be stronger.

Without a doubt, this is a place where we are family and where it is safe to be honest about where we are on the journey of faith.

Right now, I'd like to give you a few brief moments to reflect on a place where you may have some doubts about something.

Maybe you have a question that has continued to run through your mind as you study or as you hear a sermon. Maybe there is something you've been wondering about.

So, I'm inviting you to take a moment to write that down – whatever it is – a question, a statement, a doubt. This is for you and no one else unless you choose to share it at another time.

Once you've written it down, put it in your pocket or purse to take home with you. I'll give you a couple of minutes to do this.

### ***PAUSE FOR A MOMENT***

Now, as I said before, put the card in your pocket or your purse and carry that doubt, or question, around with you this next week. Include this in your prayers each day, asking God to reveal to you whatever it is He wants you to see.

Friends, know that you are blessed by our Savior. You are blessed for the faith you have, even without seeing or having a direct experience. You are blessed as you

continue serving Him and others, even as you carry some doubts with you. You are His Easter People and you are blessed.

If you feel like you can share your doubt, then I encourage you to do it – whether it be over a meal, or favorite beverage, or perhaps at Bible Study. There are so many opportunities for us to be authentic with one another, sharing our faith, and sharing our doubts and struggles, as well.

Often times, we hear answers as we talk among other friends in faith. And, as we read and study the Word, the Holy Spirit illumines that very thing your searching for.

Our Risen Lord understands and blesses you, and uses your gifts and loving service, in spite of doubts. And he will continue to help you grow. No doubt about it!

I thank God for all you faithful Easter People, who, even in your daily struggles are aware that every morning is Easter morning – in spite of the news, in spite of your struggles, even in spite of carrying some doubts, at times.

Thanks be to God for the resurrection, for new life, and for faith.

*“Now, to (Jesus Christ,) who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”* (Revelation 1:5b-6)

Amen!

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