

Seminary is a weird thing. It's not so different than any vocation-specific educational institution, I suppose, just a little more intense perhaps. Because everyone that I knew of in my seminary had some experience with religion. Or at least a profound interest in it – a deep connection to it. For many of the people at my seminary, my self included, I came to seminary with a deep appreciation for religion. A deep nostalgia for my childhood faith. And we all show up at one place, and then systematically walk through three years of calling all of that into question.

And the faith starts to shake under the weight of questions. And then it cracked wide open. And I was afraid. I was afraid, that all the Christian theology, mostly written by men, could never put my Jesus back together again.

Blind faith

They were afraid. They were afraid of the Jews, and if you recoil at that wording, then good. We should. Given the Christian history of anti-Semitism, we should all recoil at the characterization of Jewish people in John's gospel. And we should also remember that all of that happened *after* this Gospel is written. That at the time of the writing of this Gospel, Christianity had not been used as a colonizing force in the world, and so we could assume that if the first readers of the Gospel were here with us today, they would have many questions for us. And beyond the questions about how the church has been faithful to the Gospel, they might ask us – why do you call him Doubting Thomas?

You don't call Peter "Denying Peter"? Or James "Mother Always Advocating for Him James"? But Doubting Thomas, why did that one stick?

Because by this point, all the apostles are less than believers. While the women are out running around with embalming spices and the like, they are hiding together in one place. They don't trust anyone: They doubt the intentions of their own people, and doubt the word of the women in their community.

They even doubt Jesus when he first goes up among them. Because he comes, and he stands among them, and says, "Peace be with you." But they have to wait until he goes his hands and side – proof of death, if you will – until the rejoice and see him.

That is hardly bold faith. This is the pinnacle of doubt, expressed by the fearful apostles.

It is not doubt that distinguishes Thomas, because there's plenty of that to go around. What makes Thomas different is his bravery. He has no less reason to be afraid than anyone else, and yet he is not in hiding. And his honesty. He is the one who is willing to really name his questions.

That's why he's singled out. Because people who are afraid resent people who are not driven by fear, and they fear people who ask questions. And can't we understand why Thomas questions that the disciples have seen the Risen Christ?

Because if I were Thomas, I'd look at them, still all huddled together in that room, and I'd say, "If you *really* saw Jesus, then why are you still here?" If you *really* saw Jesus, why aren't you out proclaiming the good news?

Resigned doubt

Maybe it is because they didn't *really* see Jesus. They might have gotten a look at him, but they couldn't see him because they could not see past their fear. This is a definition of blind belief, and this kind of belief changes nothing – at least not for the better.

Blind belief in scripture has led to atrocity. Blind belief in militarism has led to things like what happened in Kidipawan, Philippines this week. The massacre of farmers by the Philippine National Police – all because the farmers were demanding that the relief aid locked up by local governments be distributed to their hungry communities.

It's enough to make us jaded. It's enough to make us deniers, even. I'm not that kind of American who supports such imperialism. I'm not that kind of Christian who believes in absolutism. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not. Here's the truth about that kind of thinking. That an identity built on denial does not have the integrity of Thomas' doubt. It has the resignation of tired skepticism, and resigned skepticism and blind belief are opposite sides of the same coin, and that coin is minted in fear

Because resigned skepticism is afraid of what it cannot prove. It is afraid that if we look past what is possible and likely, we will be duped. Resigned skepticism leaves no space for anything new or good to happen. It locks us in an upper room, and bolts the door shut behind us.

A Brave Thomas

Thomas is not a resigned skeptic. Because Thomas does not close himself off from the impossible. He does not say, "I refuse to believe." He says, "I need to *see* to believe" by which he may mean, "I don't think you guys have really anything." He says, "I need to touch to believe, because I need to really experience Jesus. Because while you were all in here hiding out, but I have been out in the world." Where was Thomas anyway? Had to go to the foot of Golgatha to grieve? Is his longing for Jesus to great that he must touch the wounds, because he hopes he can help Jesus heal?

When Thomas doubts, he doubts with his heart on his sleeve. With his eyes wide open. Brave Thomas goes out into the world, and then even dares to stay another week with a group of people with whom he very much disagrees. And Brave Thomas is so open to the truth, that when he finally sees Jesus, he does not simply rejoice. He does not simply jump around at the thought of the good news.

He allows himself to be utterly transformed. Because when Jesus speaks to him, he dies to himself, and is born a new identity in Christ. That is, he makes the boldest proclamation about Jesus in all of the Gospels. "My Lord, and my God." His doubt and his faith are woven together by the power of his encounter with Christ. And with joy, he puts on his new self. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Weaving faith and doubt

In my life, how I have wanted to be brave. Mostly though, I have been afraid. Mostly, I have been more like any one of those nameless disciples hiding in an upper room than I have been like Thomas.

And I was blessed anyway. I have no reasonable excuse, nor even a scriptural-explanation for why it happened. But I proclaim to you that I have seen the risen Christ. It was a day. It was a Tuesday. It was a Tuesday in a place far away from here, in a time that is rapidly receding into my past. And, no, it did not put back together all the shattered pieces of my childhood faith, because I did not see the precious Jesus I used to know. I saw the risen Christ. And the story about it doesn't matter, because it is not my story that matters. It is *The Story* that matter. The story about how all things become new. About how, through God, the impossible *is* possible. About how our dead are not lost to us. How resurrection happens.

And how we can be a part of the story, how we can practice Resurrection if we are brave. If we are brave, like Thomas, if we stick with each other, beloved, I know that we will die to our blind faith and resigned doubt. If we are brave, I know that we can discover the faith and doubt that stem from Truth, and that the Spirit can work through us, and weave all that together into a new garment. A new and renewed community that proclaims the risen Christ among us.