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Some of Jesus' followers may stand out in our minds, such as Peter who denied knowing Jesus three times, John who is often called the Beloved Disciple, or Judas who told authorities where to find him in the Garden. Maybe you have your favorites: Mary or Martha who welcomed Jesus into their home, Matthew who collected taxes and walked away from his job to follow Jesus, or the couple Priscilla and Aquila who were early leaders in the church. Or Mary Magdalene, the first to discover the empty tomb. How about Thomas? He's often gotten a bad rap for his role. He's even received the nickname "Doubting Thomas," for he wanted more tangible evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

Like many of us might be, he was a bit skeptical. When Jesus had appeared to many of the disciples after his resurrection, Thomas was not present at the time. Maybe he was running an errand—getting food for the next meal, shopping for other necessary items, collecting water from the local well. John doesn't tell us why he wasn't there, but we're told that the others were gathered together behind locked doors due to their fear. Even though Mary Magdalene had told them that Jesus was alive, they seemed unsure, hiding behind locked

doors to avoid any confrontations with those opposed to this startling news.

While they were secluded in fear, Jesus somehow appeared among them and said, "Peace be with you." He showed them the wounds in his hands from the nailing to the cross, along with the wound in his side from the spear that the soldiers thrust into him.

Once again he spoke to them the comforting words of "Peace be with you." And then he offered them a challenge, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," along with the promise of God's Spirit guiding them as they offer forgiveness in a world hurting with brokenness and pain.

Just imagine the mixture of feelings among the disciples: shock that Jesus was still alive, surprise that Jesus could speak words of peace after dying a terrible death, and confusion about what it meant for him to send them into the world to offer forgiveness.

Thomas wasn't present when all this happened, so it makes sense that when he returned, he questioned what had happened. He needed a little more tangible proof—to see Jesus' wounds would help him to believe what had happened.

History has given Thomas a nickname—Doubting Thomas, often with a negative judgmental attitude. If one calls someone a Doubting Thomas today, it's often said with a tone of voice of disapproval that people whisper to one another. "Did you hear about Sue's doubts. Where has her faith gone?" Or "Jim had such a strong faith, and now doubts have crept into his life. We'd better pray for him that he finds his way back."

I'm not quite sure why we have made faith and doubt such polar opposites. Haven't you ever wished for more evidence? When's the last time you had questions about what you read in the Bible? When has a tragic event in your life prompted you to question God? Rather than viewing doubt and faith as opposites, I sometimes wonder if they are like two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. They're interrelated. They go together.

Theologian Frederick Buechner suggested a similar idea when he wrote:

Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.¹

Doubt: the ants in the pants of faith. I like that imagery. I've learned in hindsight that those times in my life when I questioned God, I discovered the most growth in my faith, in my trust of God. My connection to God moves from being a belief in my mind to a trust with my entire self. That's closer to what the biblical writers meant when they wrote about belief.

The primary Hebrew word for believe/faith is *aman* and is the word from which we get "amen." ... [That's why after a prayer, we say "amen," for it means] to express certainty or sureness. To say *aman* was to declare something reliable or trustworthy and to thus have confidence in it... The Greek word that translates *aman* and is used [in John's Gospel] nearly one hundred times is *pisteuo*. Again, it fundamentally means to declare something reliable, trustworthy, or steadfast. By extension, it means to rely upon or trust something or someone.²

That's something that Anselm of Canterbury discovered in his life. He's most remembered as an archbishop in England from the late 11th to early 12th century, though his life was far from easy. His father was described as harsh with a violent temper, and when at age 15 Anselm desired to enter a monastery, his father would not give his consent. After his father died, Anselm

followed his religious path, eventually becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Not long after this new role, he began having differences of opinion about his views of the church, which eventually led him into exile from the church, not only once, but twice. His writings, however, have continued to influence the church for generations, such as when he wrote *credo ut intelligam*, a Latin phrase that means “I believe so that I may understand.” He also wrote about “faith seeking understanding.” In other words, he suggested that our belief and faith involve a continual search for understanding. One doesn’t need to have all the answers to have faith. One doesn’t have to avoid asking questions in order to believe.

Part of the process of seeking understanding may include doubts, struggles, obstacles, difficulties. The biblical words for faith are more like a verb—trusting, faithing. It’s a process. Not a tangible belief. It’s ongoing, as was the case with a guy who encountered a difficult time in his prayer life. He had been offering prayers for many years, but he ran into a period of

doubt, a time he felt dry and lifeless, possibly somewhat like how Thomas might have felt after seeing Jesus die.

He stopped praying and thought for a moment. “Enough of this,” he said. He then lifted his eyes toward heaven and yelled, “Hey up there, can you hear me?”

There was no response.

He continued, “Hey, God, if you can really hear me, tell me what you want me to do with my life.”

A voice from above thundered a reply, “I WANT YOU TO HELP THE NEEDY AND GIVE YOUR LIFE FOR THE CAUSE OF PEACE!”

Faced with more of a challenge than the man wanted, he answered, “Actually, God, I was just checking to see if you were there.”

The voice from above now answered with disappointment: “THAT’S ALRIGHT; I WAS ONLY CHECKING TO SEE IF YOU WERE THERE.”³

We may also find ourselves checking in with God, asking questions, wondering, even doubting. When we do, God continues to check in with us, embracing us in love, inviting us to offer hope to the world as we believe so that we may understand.

¹ *Wishful Thinking*, 20.

² <https://cmmorrison.wordpress.com/tag/pisteuo/>

³ Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #256.