

Are you a skeptical person? Do you believe everything you hear right away? Or does it take a while before you believe something to be true?

Last week I received an email from someone I have never met. This lady left no phone number, no address, no post office box in her email but she wrote to me hoping I would reply back to her electronically. In her brief message she said she selected me because trusted me that I would be a “God fearing person who will assist (her) in carrying out (her) wish.” What was her wish? Well, that all centers on her dilemma. Her dilemma is that her doctor told her she three months to live. And since she has no family she would like to deposit all of her life savings – totaling \$3.5 million!- into my checking account. Her only stipulation was that I would give 80% of the money to charity and I would get to keep 20%. All I had to do was give her some of my personal financial information so she could transfer the money to bank account. Should I believe that email or should I be skeptical? Of course, that was way too good to be true! Without a doubt that was a liar and a potential thief who would have taken money from me rather than give it!

Lots of people say lots of things - how much do you believe? How much do you doubt? For almost two thousand years, Christians have been saying that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Do you believe it? Not everybody does. A lot of people are skeptical. Nothing is sure except death and taxes, some people say. But what about the resurrection of Jesus? A Christian would say that nothing is sure but death and taxes **and** the resurrection from the dead, **and** all the promises of the Bible. Do you believe that, or do you doubt?

This morning, we’re going to look at a part of the Bible where Jesus talks to us about doubt. And we’re going to see what the one and only cure for doubt is.

We find the disciples together on Easter evening. Now what typically happens at your house on Easter night? Well, at ours, everyone is pretty well exhausted after a big morning with all the exciting church services, Easter Breakfast, and then afterwards spending all afternoon and evening visiting with family, eating delicious foods, and of course, getting stuffed on chocolate candy, jelly beans, or marshmallow peeps. After all that we are all definitely exhausted and ready for a good night’s sleep!

For the disciples in the first century, the atmosphere was a little bit different. They were locked up in a house. They were probably tired, but more than that, they were **afraid**. Just a few days earlier, they had witnessed Jesus put to death, and now people were saying that they saw Him alive! And then

suddenly, Jesus stood among them. And everyone was overjoyed! Except for one disciple... Thomas. He wasn't with them that evening, and when he came back later and they told him that they saw Jesus alive, he was skeptical.

"I won't believe it," he said. I need to see Jesus with my eyes. I need to touch Jesus' wounds with my hands. I need physical proof. Otherwise, I won't believe.

Why was Thomas so skeptical? You see, Thomas didn't want to get burned again. For 3 years, he had followed Jesus and thought He was the Messiah. But then he saw things and heard things that made him feel like something was not right. He saw Jesus arrested, even though He was all-powerful. He saw Jesus tortured and crucified even though Jesus could raise people from the dead. None of this made any sense to Thomas. Everything he saw contradicted what he believed. And he wasn't about to go through that again. He needed proof.

Have you ever struggled with doubt? Is Christianity really the right religion? Are all these things I believe about Jesus really true?

What causes doubt? Thomas doubted because of the trials and troubles he witnessed during Jesus' suffering and death. That still is the number one cause of doubt today - trouble, difficulty, hardship that we go through.

It's easy to believe in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning at church when everything is well, but it's hard to believe when you're in the Emergency Room and your loved one is struggling with health problems. It's easy to believe in Jesus on Easter morning when the instruments are playing so beautifully everyone around you is singing "I Know that My Redeemer Lives" but it's hard to believe when you're surrounded by people who don't believe in anything and everyone thinks you're foolish for believing in Jesus. When difficulties and hardships enter our lives, faith is tested. We struggle with doubts.

When those doubts arise, what do you do? Where do you go? What's the cure? During the days when the Bible was written - the cure was simple: spend time with the risen Jesus. A week after Thomas first doubted, Jesus appeared to him. He showed Thomas His hands & side, the very wounds Jesus received when He paid for Thomas' sins. Stop doubting and believe, Jesus told him. And just like that, Thomas' doubt went away. "My Lord and my God," he confessed. No more doubting for Thomas. Someone once said, "Those who doubt most, and yet strive to overcome their doubts, turn out to be some of Christ's strongest disciples." That sounds like Thomas.

Today, Jesus wants us to believe without visible proof - "Because you have seen me, you have believed," he said to Thomas. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." He's talking about us in these verses. Not seeing, and yet believing. And so for you and me today - what is the cure for doubt? How can we believe without seeing?

Thomas touched the wounds of Christ. You and I can touch the wounds of Christ every time we receive the Lord's Supper. Thomas was able to look Jesus in the eye. Today you and I can see Jesus every time we read the Bible or hear His Word preached and taught. And what do we see when we read the Bible, what do we experience when we receive the Lord's Supper? We see a Savior who looks at us with eyes of love. We see a Savior who knows all about our doubts and fears and unanswered questions, and He says to us, "Peace be with you."

"But look at all of my problems," you and I say. "**But** look at My sacrifice for you," **Jesus** says. Here in the Bible we see a Savior who forgave Thomas for his unbelief, and still today He keeps forgiving us for all the times we have also have struggled to believe plus all our other sins that we confess. The Gospel writer John tells us that this right here - the Word - this is the place to go whenever we have doubts: "these are written that you may believe - not have doubts and be skeptical but **believe** - that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Throughout your life there will probably come times when you will wonder if God really loves you. During times of struggle and worry, you may even doubt that He cares for you at all. When that happens, you know what to do: Go to the Bible. Listen to His words of forgiveness, grace, and love. Come to the Lord's Supper, and receive the body and blood of the Lord, sacrificed for you. Here is your cure for doubt. Stop doubting, and believe. Amen.

Lily, Meara, Ben, Alyssa Gruber, Jackie, Alex, Courtney, Hunter, Alyssa Radke, Crystal, Braxton, Madison, Conner, Lena, Jenna, and Faith: You made it! Well, just about made it. You have survived Public Review last Wednesday evening. You answered, by memory, all of the questions I threw at you from the Small Catechism. Now, hopefully you've been able to breathe a little bit easier and you can soak in this morning's service.

In a few moments you will be coming forward to make your promises to remain faithful to your God and Savior for the rest of your life and by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word the Lord promises to bless you. On the day you were baptized, your parents and sponsors came forward and said, "Yes" to all the many blessings that God poured out on you that day- including the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Today, each of you will be coming forward for yourself to say, "Yes!" to the promises of God's love for you in Christ. It's a proud moment for your parents, a proud moment for your baptismal sponsors, a proud moment for your family who have come to witness this special day in your life, it's a proud moment for your church family, all of us here, particularly your confirmation teachers you've had over the years. It's also a proud moment for the Day School teachers and/or Sunday school teachers you've had here at First Lutheran. And one more thing, it is also a proud moment for me. You all have done very well. I've enjoyed our Wednesday afternoon classes together and I will miss them. I was pleased with how well everyone got along with each other in class and how respectful you were toward each other as well as to me. What's more, each one of you has many God-given gifts and talents which have I've enjoyed seeing in our year of Catechism classes together and I look forward to seeing those gifts blossom within you in the years to come as you fulfill your promises to remain faithful to your Lord. You'll do that by continuing to worship regularly. And I also hope you'll be involved in our outstanding youth group program all throughout your upcoming high school years! Parents, please make sure they come!

It's my prayer that you all will hold on to what you have learned in all of your years **SO FAR** of Christian instruction and that you will remain faithful to God by being in His Word and being in worship where He wants to give and keep on giving you the gifts of forgiveness, life, and strength for your faith in Him.

And speaking of faith, I wish I could assure that after you come up front here in a few moments, kneel down before God and confirm your faith in Him that from that moment on no doubts about your faith will ever pop into your

minds again. But believe it or not, **every** Christian struggles with questions and doubts at some time or another. We even see how it happened to one of Jesus' closest followers in today's Gospel lesson.

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