

The gospel lesson today with the story of Thomas, gives us one of the most famous nicknames in all of scripture. It's such a common nickname that even if you have not attended church any time or read the Bible you've heard the expression 'doubting Thomas' right? So we've all heard it. It comes from this text. And the other disciples get a lot of nicknames too: Peter is called 'The Rock,' we know Judas' nickname- "the traitor." But most of the other nicknames are pretty good. Thomas gets the name 'doubting Thomas' which I'm going to argue today, I don't think it's really very fair. I think Thomas is getting a bad rep and I want to talk about what is the role of doubt in faith? Is there a role of doubt in faith? Doubt can go two ways I think, when it comes to the area of spiritual growth. I think we live in a culture right now that doubts pretty much everything. And that can be good but at some point doubting and doubting and doubting can lean to cynicism. We say our political parties aren't any good; I'm not going to be involved, our churches aren't any good; I'm not going to be involved. No institution is really worth me getting involved. I doubt everything. I'm cynical about everything and humor has sort of a [00:01:29] edge it's sort of a very critical edge. Everything is doubt, doubt. If I can't experience it I don't believe it. And what a limiting view of the world; Beauty, is something that we experience but can we prove it through anything else [00:01:49] love? These things are immeasurable. We can't prove it but we know they're there. So I think that that doubt, the doubt for believing anything that I can't see is not real, is a limiting doubt. I know living in Washington DC a very sophisticated town, I go out too dinner parties or events and people say "Hey, you got to meet this guy, he's a minister." And it's sort of like they're introducing a

blacksmith, it's like, from another time. And they're like "Really? A minister? They're still around? They still exist? Oh wow that's so strange. How could anybody who's sophisticated, who's well educated, possibly still be involved in church or faith or spirituality?" Because we doubt that; we doubt that in our culture. And I think that kind of doubt, at some point, can get to be an unhealthy thing. But I don't think that's the doubt of Thomas. I think the doubt of Thomas is really very different. Thomas' doubt, I believe is the doubt of saying "I really don't understand this. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me. I haven't seen Jesus rise yet. I haven't experienced Jesus and until I do I'm not going to believe." And I think, from the teachings of this church, that that's exactly how faith works. We're supposed to doubt. We have our doubts. Too often the church tells us to be ashamed of our doubts; don't talk about your doubts. Keep your doubts to yourself. We all have them. In fact, if we imagine how incredible God is, how can we not have doubts? Because there's no way we can completely understand, and in that gap between understanding and doubt comes belief. And I think when Thomas says "I want to experience it." That is a call for all of us to ask the same question. I think we can make that same demand of God: I want to experience God. Like, my experience with people who have a faith background, there are those who end up right where Thomas does when he says "You are the Lord?" And in their teachings they'd say "No that's all you have to do just say the right words and you're done; it's finished." But when the tough time comes, and there will be tough times, there will be unexpected tragedies in life, I find that faith doesn't last. It's almost like the house built on sand because I'm just taking what someone told me. It's in my head; it's not in my heart. I've not wrestled with it and then I've met other people who come up to me and say "I feel so bad. You know I

don't know if I believe Jesus is really God. I don't know if I really believe in life after death. I don't know; I've got doubts. I don't know if there's a loving God." And when they say that to me I generally experience a response saying "That's great." God can handle those doubts. That's a loving, motivated doubt that can lead you to belief. Be honest about it, wrestle with it, God loves you for that type of doubting. And I believe, in the gospel story today, that's what Thomas is teaching us, that it's okay to ask questions; we all have them, it's okay to doubt; we all do, and it's okay to build your faith upon experience; that's great.

Today we're going to be doing a baptism for Oliver and in our culture today, that makes no sense. Why would we in this old building with these old rights and this old practice go back to something like that? I doubt, if I'm in the secular culture, it really matters very much. But I think it's one of the most important things you could do as parents, is to say "There's a more complex world out there and the spiritual world is as real as the physical world and love and beauty and God are going to be important parts of Oliver's life and so we're acknowledging that in saying "Yes, society you might have doubts but there is more here than meets the eye." The other path of baptism is, when we do the baptism, we're not saying that "Oliver we bless forever." Oliver in his life will have his doubts. He's going to have his questions. He's going to have his struggles and that's the only way to grow spiritually but he's going to have the blessing of people around him who love him; the angels in his life who have blessed him; that's how we get through doubt. It's through that. It's knowing that it's okay to question, it's okay to struggle in fact you're faith will be stronger if you have doubts. So let's hear it for doubting Thomas. I think he's under appreciated and a

great spiritual teacher for all of us so Thomas, thank you for doubting and giving us the benefit of the doubt. Amen.