

Easter 2, 2017

Thomas The Skeptic

Cady Sommer, Youth Sunday preacher

If I were to hear a single person in this congregation right now say that they don't relate to Thomas, I wouldn't believe them. I find it very hard to believe that anyone here has not experienced doubt in some sort of way in their life. Doubt comes in many shapes and sizes, and it's constantly around us. Whether it's through politics, work, relationships, or college decisions, it's second nature to be uncertain. For me, and I assume many others, uncertainty could be considered first nature. Anyone who knows me can easily attest to the fact that I second guess every choice I make. It's very difficult for me to be 100% confident in my decisions, which means that it's very scary for me when I am certain about a choice. I will admit that I get terrified when my gut tells me that I'm making the right decision, because there's still a part of me that tells me that I could be wrong, that something could go not according to plan, or that it will be a mistake. And I think that makes me human.

College is right around the corner for me, and my decision to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign this fall was simultaneously one of the easiest and hardest decisions I've ever made. I knew that Illinois would provide me with the academic and cultural life that I was looking for, which is why it was so easy for me to become an Illini. My boyfriend of almost three years and a few of my closest friends had also decided to attend Illinois, so it seemed like a no brainer to go there. But two people, whom I value the most in my life, were against my idea. They had believed that a small, private liberal arts college would be a better fit. I started thinking over their reasoning, and I all of a sudden became doubtful because I couldn't clearly see my future anymore, just like Thomas couldn't believe that Jesus had truly risen. And that scared me. Two sides of me were fighting, one that wanted to trust what I was feeling, and one that wanted to make my parents happy. I eventually had to choose what would make me happy, and thankfully I have such amazing parents that I know will support me every step of the way.

As I mentioned before, I have been in a relationship with a boy for a while now and we will both be attending U of I this fall. Now this relationship has also seen some doubt. Not in the form of our feelings, but over religion. My boyfriend, Danny, is a first generation Ukrainian. His parents grew up in the Soviet Union, where the Communist regime had the ideological objective to eliminate religion. Because of this, Danny is atheist.

He never grew up in a place of religion and he finds it very hard to believe in a God when there are so many horrible things going on in the world right now. We sometimes have very long discussions where we question why and how life exists, and the difficulties we have when it comes to understanding the existence of a God. In case you didn't know, my mom is the priest here, so religion has always been a no-brainer for me. But ever since Danny entered my life, he has allowed me to doubt why I'm a Christian. Whether this was his intention or not, he has made me a stronger believer in God. Because I question if there is a God, I'm able to reevaluate the reasons as to why I believe, which pushed me to realize the full extent of my faith. This whole process has allowed me to reaffirm my place in the Christian world and truly become comfortable with what I believe. Doubt is what pushed me to realize that.

As much as a paradox as this may sound, without doubt, there's no way you can become certain about anything. When you question something, you can evaluate why you believe what you believe.

It seems to me that Thomas did that. He questioned what his friends had told him about having seen Jesus resurrected. I mean come on. He witnessed Jesus's death, and now he's being told that Jesus is alive again? No wonder he rejected his friends' observations. But he didn't leave the group. He didn't go back to Galilee and back to his old life. In some way, he must have kept an open mind. That's what skeptics have, right? An open mind. And Jesus appeared to him. And because he had that open mind, because he had questioned and stayed around to figure out the answer, he was able to say, "My Lord and my God," with integrity.

I hope to remain an open-minded person, and I encourage you to do the same. Skepticism is not a bad thing, and I think it's okay to question things around you. Thomas questioned his own knowledge of death, just like I questioned the beliefs of those whom I hold close to my heart. It's okay to not go with the flow and immediately accept what's being put in front of you. It's okay to protest and it's okay to fight for what you believe in, because at the end of the day, nothing can ever be 100% explained. The doubt that emerges in your life will allow you to reevaluate your faith and belief. That's what happened to Thomas, and that's what happened to me.