

“Do you believe?” is a question I ask three times before every baptism. “Do you believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?” Adults answer for themselves. Parents and godparents answer on behalf of infants. All of us renew our promises at every baptism we attend. Each Sunday we recite the creed together; we say, “We believe,” but at baptism you answer personally, “I do” to each question, “Do you believe?”

Many people say, “Yes, I believe,” and they welcome the question as if someone asked them do they root for their high school sports team or love the person they’re engaged to. “Yes,” they say, “glad you asked, glad to have the chance to tell you. This is important to me, and I’m happy to say it out loud and in public.”

Other people say, “Yes, I believe,” but they mean, “I think I believe. I hope I believe. I don’t believe as strongly as I used to or as strongly as I might, but I choose to believe as best I can.”

Some people struggle with their faith today, but so did some of the people who lived with Jesus. Peter denied him three times. Most of his friends abandoned him on the cross. And then there’s Thomas. Here’s a story most people forget: About halfway through John’s Gospel, Jesus learns that Lazarus has died over in Judea. The disciples try to talk him out of going there because his enemies will stone him to death. When Jesus insists on going, Thomas bravely says, “Let us also go to die with him.” Thomas had the strongest faith that day, but later, he doubted.

Thomas was probably grief-stricken when Jesus was put to death. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared, and he wouldn’t believe their story. Maybe they had played tricks on him before. Thomas wanted physical proof; he didn’t want faith; he wanted science. Jesus waited a week, maybe to give Thomas a chance to believe. But in the end, Thomas had to see him and touch him for himself.

Many of the first Christians had seen the risen Jesus, but many others had not. As future generations came along, and the gospel spread to other lands, more and more people faced the battle between doubt and faith. The story of Thomas sent this message: “Hey, it happened to the best of them. Even one of Jesus’ own apostles doubted the resurrection. Someone who spent every day and night with him for years experienced doubt. It happens. But Jesus wants to appear to you more than you know. He desires your faith more than you want to give it. He will make himself known in wounds, in the breaking of bread, in your moments of grief and desperation, in times of joy, in the promise of success, and in the dawn of a new day. The miracles of life are all around you, and they all proclaim the resurrection.” It is because of the wonders of life, because of the goodness of others, and because of love that we are ready to answer the question, “Do you believe?” with the only answer that makes sense, the answer we feel in our bones: Yes.