Do ya know that ya know that ya know that ya know that if you died today, you’d spend eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior?

It always makes me giggle when my dad does his best evangelist voice and impersonates this…shall we say…intense question.

I can imagine the hair of the evangelist preacher man asking this scary question. You know the hair that never moves? It is sort of magically glued in an upright fashion and no strand is out of place. Even the Southern Baptist evangelist’s hair knows to stay in line…or else!

My, my, we are still recovering from the terror of fundamentalism, aren’t we?

Even with years of relief among theological refuges such as Wilshire, the poison of shame and fear seems to still linger in the cracks and crevices of our faith.

It sounds like Thomas did not know that he knew that he knew that he knew that Jesus had really risen. It was probably that extra three or four layers of certainty that he was missing. Poor thing.

This litmus test question my family jokingly remembers equates disbelief with eternal damnation.

An eternal fiery home of despair.

That’ll send a shiver up your spine. I still vividly remember the shiver that went up my spine when I learned about this place called Hell at a church camp in Maumelle, Arkansas. I knew that Hell was not a place I wanted to visit.

Some of us have escaped this toxic worldview, but many have not.

Our own Dr. Kathryn Keller, a dear member of our church, my pastoral residency liaison (and friend!) is doing such marvelous work to provide a life raft to those drowning in the waters of fundamentalist shame.

In her private practice here in
Dallas, Dallas Therapy Collective, Kathryn and her team offer highly specialized care for something called spiritual abuse.

Kathryn is an expert on diagnosing, measuring and treating the psychological and physiological effects of this harmful theology that pervades much of evangelicalism in the United States.

It seems the evangelical community has lost sight of God’s great patience with honest and even holy disbelief.

I mean, was Thomas afraid to publicly doubt the resurrection of Jesus?

You know, I don't think so. If he believed his eternal safety was at stake with raising an eyebrow at this good news, I doubt he would have shown such scaaaaaary skepticism so boldly to his peers.

“Unless I see the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” (v.25)

Well, goodness. What a bold declaration. Thomas shows no hesitancy in telling his disciples exactly what he thinks about all of that.

I wonder if Thomas thought his conditions for belief were impossible to fulfill.

He could have been saying his own version of “I will believe when pigs fly” or when hell freezes over or when the cows come home... I have never quite understood the cow one myself.

Perhaps. Or maybe it was his candid refusal to fall for a silly trick. He could not afford to lose hope on account of his own gullibility—that's for sure!

He had fallen for enough already. He had fallen right into discipleship and it had cost him so much. In the depths of his grief, this was no joking matter. This was no April’s fools' prank or insensitive hoax.

This was the supposed resurrection of his Lord and Savior, his teacher, his God.

And there was too much at stake for him to naively bite when offered the best news he could ever hope to hear. What if it was too good to be true?

And so he protects himself with such specific and demanding conditions. He will only believe if he can touch and feel and
experience this “resurrection” (gesture to air quotes).

He isn’t up for mind games or belief that requires him to do mental gymnastics. The logistics of resurrection are overwhelming.

It is much easier to buck up and protect his vulnerable, sorrowfully skeptical heart.

But Jesus seems to hear his demands from afar. Even if Thomas did not see Jesus when he first appeared after the resurrection, Jesus still seeks out the trust of Thomas.

No demand is too silly or specific or sinful for Jesus if it leads to a closer relationship with Him.

No barrier of the heart is too thick. No wall erected is too durable. No disbelief is too sinful for Jesus himself to interfere in.

Unlike the tradition I described earlier which relates to doubt as sinful and a sure ticket to Hell, Jesus sees Thomas’ doubt a different way.

He sees that Thomas is still willing to believe. Thomas has not written off Jesus. If anything, he has been transparent about his doubt. Even with a scowl across his face, he was secretly really, really hoping that this pig would...fly.

*Meet me in my disbelief,* his soul seems to cry. *Take my mustard seed of faith and help it grow, please God.*

Jesus would never give up on Thomas. A week passed, and low and behold Jesus appears in their house even though the “doors were shut.”

Jesus doesn’t need a key to enter through the door. His risen body enters through any barrier that tries to block him. Including Thomas’s protected heart.

And enter in he does. He appears in resurrected majesty right before their eyes.

This pig might fly, indeed. He greets them with peace. And peace is what they will need. The combination of terror and joy continues in this gospel scene.

And now it is time for a reckoning. Jesus says to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” (vs.27)
Thomas couldn’t scare Jesus away with his demands. Grace always catches up with us eventually.

Jesus not only meets his demands by showing off his resurrected body.

*Come on dear one, touch me,* he says. *I won’t bite. I am risen. I am here. I love you and you are always mine.*

I imagine Thomas taking his own weary, skeptical hand and touching the sacred scars of his Savior.

Scars that came with a massive price.

As his hand entered the hand of Jesus, Thomas felt convicted to trust the wounded Christ. Doubt and disbelief dissolved with every tender touch.

Even the resurrected Christ was still patiently tending to the doubts of his disciples. What wondrous love is this?

As if the betrayal and the mockery from all sides was not enough to endure, Jesus was still willing to prove who he was.

His abundant love never ran out.

His grace and mercy and willingness to save those he loved could never be extinguished.

The wounded hands of the wounded Christ would always stretch out toward his beloved.

It is so important for us to recognize that Jesus’ resurrected body still had signs of wounding.

Did you hear that? Even in rising from the dead, Jesus Christ, son of God, did not lose the most significant mark of his humanity. Fully human, fully God, even out of the grave.

Jesus never shied away from embodied expressions of his humanity.

He knew that part of what made him a trustworthy messiah was his willingness to get in the nitty gritty of human existence.

And in this case, Thomas trusted him all the more because Jesus was willing to meet his requirements for belief.

Jesus would put up with skepticism and even chase after those who were willing to believe but he does remind Thomas who is really in charge
“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’”

These words from Jesus have been interpreted by fundamentalist communities as a reprimand of doubt.

“Well, well, let me tell you something. Those traditional interpretations have completely dismissed Jesus’ radical patience with Thomas.

Jesus is not condemning Thomas’ doubt. He is reminding him however that this faith thing will require much more of him. Faith will be out of his control.

Jesus is asking for his trust.

I am so glad that therapists like Kathryn are tending to the deep wounds of evangelical Christianity.

Much of our work as a Church must be to show the embodied patience of God with those who have doubted and then felt condemned for their doubt.

In an article that recently highlighted Kathryn’s work, the authors describe the tragic disconnect between body, mind and spirit that has occurred at the hands of evangelical Christianity.

The article reads:

“A major complicating factor in the treatment of religious trauma is the fact that many evangelicals are taught not to listen to or trust their bodies.

‘Evangelicalism encourages folks to exist primarily in their minds, in a world of thoughts, beliefs, and mental constructs,’ said Brian Peck. ‘Thought control is often viewed as the solution rather than its own source of suffering.’”

Dear ones, we do not have to prove the risen Christ with expertly crafted theologies, fool-proof logic or intellectual arguments.

We also don’t have to sacrifice our God-given intellect on the throne of unpredictable bodily reactions and emotions.
We can follow the way of Christ, in mind, body and soul. Amen.

We can prove his resurrection with our own wounds – showing all the ways God has breathed new life into dying flesh.

(Gestures to different parts of my arms/hands)

This is the divorce I survived.

This is where the cancer didn’t win.

This is the grief I will always carry.

This is the thing I thought would kill me but didn’t.

This is the resilience of all people of color who fight for their dignity and equality every day.

Our wounded hands, our loving hearts, and our curious minds will prove the love of the risen Christ more than any mental construct ever could.

Love is just more interesting than that.

Let us begin to trust the wounded Christ. He is always worthy of our trust.