

“Finding God in the Waves: Science and Losing Faith”
John 20:19-29

Scientific insights can sometimes challenge some of our long-held or cherished beliefs about ourselves and the world. This is what happened to Mike McHargue when he read these words from Carl Sagan’s book, *Pale Blue Dot*:

“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there--on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Here is a video of these words as read by Carl Sagan himself:

<https://youtu.be/wupToqz1e2g>

McHargue writes, “Sagan’s words wrecked me. Nothing ever had shifted my perception of reality so violently.” He started thinking, “‘For God so loved the world’ seems absurd from the *Voyager’s* vantage point. Earth is a waterlogged pebble, one planet among countless others. What possible significance does the salvation of humankind hold?...This broke me forever.” Then there was the quote in Sagan’s book from his widow, Ann Druyan, saying, “Look back again at the pale blue dot of the preceding chapter. Take a good long look at it. Stare at the dot for any length of time and then try to convince yourself that God created the whole Universe for one of the 10 million or so species of life that inhabit that speck of dust. Now take it a step further: Imagine that everything was made just for a single shade of that species, or gender, or ethnic or religious subdivision. If this doesn’t strike you as unlikely, pick another dot. Imagine it to be inhabited by a different form of intelligent life. They, too, cherish the notion of a God who has created everything for their benefit. How seriously do you take their claim?”

After reading this quote, McHargue’s doubts about God grew to the point of thinking that God was simply “implausible. A myth concocted by frightened apes in a dangerous world. The most grandiose images in Scripture seemed laughably small when viewed from the perspective of cosmology.”

How did Mike deal with his doubt? He hid it from his family and his church. He was a part of a church that would not have welcomed such thoughts, doubts, or questions. He went into hiding about his budding atheism for a couple of years. He was even teaching Sunday

School while having no faith himself. He was very sad about losing his church family and friends that he did not open up about his doubts.

The truth of the matter is most of us go through periods of doubt or spiritual dryness. Some studies show that about 42% of Americans will undergo a faith transition at some point in their lives. Yet, in many religious circles, these doubts are suppressed, hidden, or flat out rejected. What we miss out on is the opportunity to help each other grow through such periods.

Today we will look at how Jesus dealt with the doubt of one of his disciples, Thomas. Instead of rejecting the doubts and questions of Thomas about the resurrection, Jesus responded to his questions and doubts. The environment which Jesus created among his disciples must have been open enough to allow doubt to be shared out loud instead of being denied or hidden. Instead of rejecting his doubts and questions, Jesus found a great opportunity to nurture Thomas's faith and equip him for the journey ahead. The questions and doubts that Thomas raised became tools for teaching him about a deeper trust in God that led him to do great deeds of faith. Thomas helped spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to a multitude of people. The members of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India tell us that it was Thomas who brought the good news to India.

I love how Jesus shows us how to be compassionate to one another in times of doubt. His ego was not injured when Thomas doubted. He did not write him off as an unbeliever. He did not demand certainties and doctrines out of Thomas. Instead, he engaged him in an experience of presence and touching. Thomas simply needed a physical experience of the divine presence that would help him grow in his faith. A list of doctrines or statements of beliefs would have had the opposite effect on Thomas.

This is a great story that shows how faith is formed and nurtured in times of doubt. We learn about and experience God, yet many of us go through times of doubt and questioning. I dare say that we need these questions and doubts because they help us let go of the familiar things of faith that have become too familiar and lost their meaning. Through questions we can let go of what we know, of our own hold on the truth, and of our egos! Questions of doubt help us move beyond where we are to be open to new mysteries and revelations from God. Our questions help lead us from believing what others say about God to having our own firsthand deeper knowledge of God. Doubt helps us move inward with God. Instead of an outward faith, doubt leads us to pay attention to what is going on inside of us. It is a movement often from knowing God in our intellect to knowing God in the depth of our being. Doubt and questions can become our doorway to true experiences of faith. They help us move from one stage of faith to another deeper one until we ultimately reach a point where we are more in tune with mystery than with answers.

The next time, you have questions about God or faith, allow them to emerge and to lead you to that deeper space of unknowing and uncertainty. Find a friend or a group of friends who can hold the space for you to do just that without trying to fix you or convince you of the presence of God. Listen to the stirrings of your heart and allow the Spirit to pray within you on those days when you can't honestly pray. If you are the friend who is listening to the doubts of another, resist the temptation to give simple answers. Lean with your friend into what is stirring within their souls.

We will now listen to a scripture about faith from Hebrews 11:1. We will use Lectio Divina to listen to it to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us about faith and doubt in our lives. I will read the scripture three times with pauses in between. The first time, the invitation is to pay attention to a word or a phrase that shimmers for you. The second time, pay attention to a feeling around your word or phrase. The third time, pay attention to a message. Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

We will end with a prayer video by Kelly Ann Hall:
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/waiting-with-thomas>

Waiting with Thomas by Kelly Ann Hall

We will be waiting, Lord on days we cannot find You;

generations down from witnessing the sealed gape in Your side,
and two healed hands extended before Thomas,
so eager to hold them and hear how it was for You &
"Tell me, Lord, how did You endure?"
because, in Your absence,

Thomas grieved and feared,
ran and hid and in his mind traveled far, so far...
Struggling his way to a new reality where he chose You
and remembered again what he had decided was worth living and dying for -
to have the chance to get another glimpse of You
one more miracle to be seen through his eyes,
through his own two eyes that longed to see again &
because he believed more than he doubted
that You were who You said You were
and did what You said You would do.
Bless Your people, who believe greater than we doubt;
who are afraid until we remember, who long to behold You.
Give us the strength of Thomas,
the resolve to wait with hope,
Grant us the faith to see. Amen.