

Scientists studied a rare snake. It was born with two heads, and each tried to control the body. One moment it would crawl one way, then the other mind would take over, and it would change directions. Two heads. Two minds. Seems impossible, and yet isn't that exactly what doubt does to us? It pulls us in two directions, like a second mind that wants to take us away from faith.

Why wasn't Thomas "with" the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them? Why wasn't the guy who most needed to see and touch (to erase his doubts) in the right place at the right time? And for that matter, where are we? Easter is only a week past and we too have scattered back to our normal routines and often find ourselves hiding from what make us most afraid.

Think for a moment about how "normal" doubt is. Moses didn't think God could use him because of his speech impediment. Sarah was convinced she was too old for kids. Jacob couldn't believe Esau would ever forgive him and David's brothers were terrified that they would get what they deserved for selling their brother into slavery. Mary asked, "How can I be so favored?" Even in the garden, Jesus prayed, "are you sure there isn't another way?" Doubt is the beginning of faith and is the human component of the two sided nature of faith. We believe. We doubt. We believe. We doubt. We believe.

Thomas was no different than the other disciples. They had their own doubts or wouldn't have hidden behind locked doors. And Jesus' first words to them were "look at my hands and feet." John reveals, "THEN they believed." Just as their eyes were opened, later so were those of Thomas, and now, yours and mine.

Thomas' doubt is famous; and so is ours. We wonder how strongly we believe. We want proof. We are confused when God doesn't answer as we like. We believe, but we carry doubts. But doubt is necessary for belief, because faith is not based on facts but in ignoring fear.

The English word for "belief" is related to the word "love." People "believed" the things that they "beloved." Jesus builds on that concept as he asked his disciples over and over, "do you understand my love?" And then he washed feet. And then he conquered death. God's love is the basis of our belief. Faith is nothing more than allowing that love to overpower real doubts and fears.

The Holy Spirit (God's breath of life) gives power to our faith. Faith is God's breath being stronger than our doubts. Faith is God's life being stronger than our weakness. Faith is holding on to a loving God who reaches out to each of us. When John relates that Jesus "breathed on his disciples" it is a powerful reminder that God fills us with his very own breath of life! "Holy CPR!" The breath that Jesus inhaled in a manger and exhaled on a cross is your gift of faith! This is what overpowers fear and doubt, as God's precious breathing overcomes doubts and fears and empowers our own servant love and faith.

Doubt is the beginning of faith. Fear is only the darkness that precedes Easter's dawn. Behind locked doors and closed windows of doubt, those disciples were gifted with faith – even though they still couldn't see what coming next. Faith is the same gift for us – allowing the loving arms of Jesus that reach triumphantly from the cross and tomb and hold on to us, no matter what we fear or face.

In the 1800's an English scientist wrote, "*well-washed domestic dogs grow dull; they miss the stimulus of fleas. Fleas are a nuisance and it is amazing something so tiny can be so distracting. They don't keep a dog for being a dog but remind a dog that it is a dog. Faith and doubt have a similar relationship.*"

The fleas of doubt nip at our conscience, irritate our assumptions, and disturb our expectations. Likewise doubts get our attention and awaken the need for faith. Rather than fearing that doubt means a weak faith, simply realize you are being honest about your human shortcomings.

Frederick Buechner says "*doubts are the ants in our pants of faith,*" They are the itches and twitches that keep faith alive, awake, and moving, and keep us from being too self confident or thinking that we alone are so special that we don't have daily room for God in our busy lives. Doubts and fears are normal for imperfect, sinful people. Without acknowledging our weakness, it is right to wonder if someone really has faith at all. Faith is believing what we can't see and knowing that God is stronger than what we can't control. And when we have doubt, we know we are useless without God!

Mother Theresa is one that all would certainly feel had faith. How else could she spend 50 years in the emptiness and poverty of Calcutta's slums? A new book titled, "Mother Theresa: Come Be My Light" contains forty years of letters in which she often express her own doubts about Christ's love. This surprised many, but the longer she worked in the slums the more difficult for her faith became, and yet she continued to cling to that faith. Faith became an active choice, not a passive assumption. And so it is for us.

Like those disciples, this is where we begin. Acknowledge your weakness and surrender to the God who has wrapped you in his arms of love. When you aren't afraid to admit your frailties, you begin to understand the power of the gift of faith.

In the Garden of Eden, a serpent brought the curse of doubt. By the gift of an empty cross and tomb, Jesus healed that distraction with the gift of faith. The Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis told about the monk who had long planned to go to Jerusalem to see the Holy Sepulchre. He finally began with the money he had saved over 40 years. Soon after he left the monastery, he passed a field where a pale, emaciated man was digging roots out of the ground, and he said to the monk, "Good morning, Father. Where are you going?" The monk replied, "I am going to Jerusalem to see the Holy Sepulchre, where Christ was buried, and I am going to march around it three times and pray." The man in the field said, "That trip will cost much money." "Yes," said the monk, "all my life's savings." Then the man suggested, "Father, why not march around me three times and give me the money so that my wife and children might have food." And the monk did.

The monk never saw where Christ was buried. But he saw where Christ was alive and living -- in other people!

Thomas is called the "twin." He was of two minds – doubt and faith, side by side. We are the same. Don't let your doubts plug up the channels to God. Instead pray daily, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." Do like Thomas and reach out and touch the body broken and blood shed for you – as you let go, He will lift you, empower you, and give you new life.