

Text: John 20:24-29

Title: "Is It Real?!?"

Introduction: When Sarah and I were early in our marriage and still in college our next door neighbors brought home a puppy that they found on the side of the road. The veterinarian that they took the puppy to said that it was a mix, but was made up mostly of pit bull. It didn't matter, once Sarah and I saw that puppy, we had to make room in our lives for it. We were about to graduate from college and were headed out into the work-force ... with our pit bull puppy.

Now, when most of us hear pit bull, we think big, mean, dangerous dog. Sarah had heard that too, so we decided to handle "Steffi" in a way that might help her not be a mean dog. Every chance Sarah got, she would tell Steffi, "You're a poodle."

Steffi was the wimpiest dog in the world. That dog would hide her big old head underneath a chair whenever it stormed outside. She would not go out in the weather. She somehow thought that she was a lap dog.

So, Steffi was a pit bull that we decided to handle a certain way so that she turned out to be a good pet. That's what we are going to do today.

We've been working our way through LENT and attacking the Giants in our lives that prevent us from being and experiencing all that God wants in this life. We have attacked the Giants of: Fear, Worry and Discouragement so far. That's three down and three to go.

The GIANT we are working on this week is kind of like Steffi. This is not a Giant that we are going to ATTACK as much as a Giant we are going to figure out how to handle so it is usable in our lives. The Giant that we are going to learn how to handle this week is "DOUBT". In order to talk about Doubt, I think we have to take some time with the Bible's ultimate doubter; Thomas.

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Thomas was what we would call, the skeptic of the group. Thomas was the one that asked the hard questions and wanted proof of everything that was said. He was kind of a black-and-white, scientific kind of guy who asked all of the "WHY" questions.

Example: In John 14 Jesus is explaining to the twelve disciples that He was going to leave them. He was explaining that the Son of Man had to die to bring glory to God, but they were not to worry. Jesus said, "You know the place that I am going and how to get there." Now, if it weren't for Thomas, we might all still be confused about Jesus' statement. But, Thomas said, "We do not know where you are going and we certainly do not know how to get there! What are you talking about, Jesus?"

Jesus answered his disciple's question by saying, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except by Me." In other words Jesus said that the only way to be with God after this life is through a relationship / partnership in *this* life with Jesus. If Thomas had not asked Jesus what He was talking about, we might not have that clear explanation from Jesus...

That gives an idea of who Thomas was. He was the inquiring mind of the group. He was going to ask the questions, so he didn't have to assume anything. He probably asked the questions that many of the other guys were too afraid to ask. Not Thomas! He

was up front and pulled no punches. He wanted the answers ... and probably had an outline that he kept to help him remember what he needed to once Jesus was gone.

That reminds me ... Before we go any further; I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our scripture for today and on the other side is an outline of the message for this morning, complete with blanks to fill in. My hope is that you will hear something today that will help you with your battle with the Giant of "Doubt" or will help someone you know to overcome this Giant.

Let's start with our Bible Reading for today from the Book of John:

### **READ JOHN 20:24-29 NOW AND PRAY!**

We're going to tear this Scripture apart and look at how Doubt affects us and then how we are going to HANDLE Doubt so that it becomes more of a poodle in our lives than a pit bull.

#### I. Dealing With Doubts

##### **A. Doubt Develops in Isolation (v.24)**

1. Throughout the Bible we find people who had doubts. People who were very prominent – David, Job, Solomon – had their days of doubt; mostly happening when they were ALONE.
2. Even John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, the baptizer of Jesus, the one predicted in the Old Testament to be the one to make the way for the Messiah; he had doubts.
  - a. When John had been put in prison by King Herod, he sat in a jail cell by himself. Alone there in the dark with plenty of time on his hands to think ... he decides to send a messenger to Jesus.
  - b. His Question? Ask Jesus if He is the One we are waiting for (Messiah/Savior) or if there is another coming along.
  - c. When alone with his thoughts, even John the Baptist doubted ... it's part of our human nature.
  - d. The question is: how do we handle it!?
3. Remember, we were created by God to need each other. When we come together it helps us all stay connected to our faith.
4. Thomas was not in the room when Jesus appeared! When everyone else was together in the Upper Room, Thomas was out by his lonesome probably trying to figure out why Jesus didn't listen to him and stay away from Jerusalem ... He'd still be alive.
5. If you spend too much time alone, doubts creep in... ask questions about your doubts ... "Is it because I have a case of the blues or is it a real doubt?"

**B. Doubt Demands Evidence (v.25)**

1. Thomas missed it! And when they came together again, the other disciples were probably fighting to be the one to tell Thomas what had happened (Jesus appearing to them behind closed doors).
2. Guess what? Thomas had the ultimate skeptic's answer, "I'll believe it when I see it!"
  - a. Thomas was not excited about what happened.
  - b. Thomas still had questions ... even though he had seen Jesus bring others back to life (Lazarus) ...
  - c. He was not going to believe that Jesus was alive until he saw for himself / until he FELT for himself!
3. Thomas was not being a jerk. It's just who he was. "It's not that I don't believe you fellas, I will just wait until I can see for myself, thank you."
4. You don't know people like that, do you?!?

**C. Doubt Draws Us Back to Christ (v.26)**

1. Again, here is the difference between 'doubt' and 'unbelief'. Thomas just doubted, which caused him to stay in Jerusalem to find out ... for 8 days! If Thomas did not believe, he wouldn't have stuck around for the evidence ... "I'm out of here!"
  - a. Can you even imagine those 8 days? The other 10 disciples still trying to convince Thomas it was true that Jesus was alive...
  - b. Maybe after 4 or 5 days, Thomas was starting to convince them that it was not true...
  - c. BUT, Thomas stuck around!
2. Sticking around gave Thomas a chance ... and Jesus came through!
  - a. Does this bring more questions? Jesus was able to appear to them without opening the door, yet he was physically the same as humanity enough to touch scars and put a hand into his sword wound.
  - b. I wonder how many times we doubt the little things when Jesus is standing in the room.
  - c. The point is: Jesus is standing in the room ... not dead ... not dying ... ever! And offers the same to us!
3. We can doubt Jesus a ton if we need to, as long as we recognize Him when He is standing in the room.

**D. Doubt Deepens Our Faith (v.27)**

1. Can you imagine how fast the doubts disappeared for Thomas once he put his hands in Jesus' side or ran his fingers along the scars on his wrists?

- a. If we use our doubts wisely and take time to find out the truth, our faith will be deepened!
  - b. Peter and John could be challenged about Jesus resurrection, “Maybe your eyes played tricks on you.”
  - c. But not Thomas; Thomas had touched the resurrected body of Jesus and would never forget it!
  - d. Thomas could say to every other doubter he ran into for the rest of his life, “I touched the wounds that killed Jesus ... I watched Him die; but, He was alive!”
  - e. Don’t doubt a doubter ... once they come to know Jesus, you can’t argue them out of it!
2. You see, doubts are useless by themselves, but if they lead us somewhere they solidify what we know and believe.
  3. Please understand that these words (v.27) are not just for Thomas ... Jesus is speaking to each one of us ...
    - a. “If you are unsure of what you believe, get close enough to me to touch.
    - b. Touch the wounds that set you free ... come close.”

**E. Doubt Defines Our Faith (v.28)**

1. Thomas questioned Jesus. He asked questions that were honestly in his heart. And he got answers.
2. When we ask honest questions, we get to solid answers.
3. Thomas had his answer to all of his questions and he expressed it by saying, “My Lord and My God!”
4. He no longer questioned who Jesus was ... he KNEW!
5. For Thomas it took this episode in his life to KNOW what he BELIEVED!
6. Jesus was no longer just a friend or a teacher or the Son of God or someone else’s God. Jesus was now *Thomas’* Lord and God!
7. What will it take for you to get there ... without a doubt?!?

**II. Disarming Your Doubts**

Remember that pit bull I was telling you about? Sarah and I had to be careful how we raised her. Same with our doubts ... we need to face them head-on, but carefully. Here’s how:

**A. Admit Your Doubts Personally**

1. Do you ever get irritated with people at church? You know, those people who are so peppy and happy and absolutely lit up by their faith??

2. You hear people say things like, “I just love how I feel God leading my life and the joy I have every day because of my faith!”
  - a. Those of you who are saying it, don’t stop, BUT, understand that it can be annoying to others.
  - b. There are people here this morning who are still wondering why on earth they come ... they have to restrain themselves from letting whoever took their parking place before worship have it with both barrels ... they have not sensed any ‘presence of God’ for a long time, they are not doing too well at work, their family life is chaotic, and if they are honest, they do not see God doing ANYTHING!
  - c. Please understand that, although I’m not sure what the reaction would be here, it would be better for you to stand up and say that out loud than to continue to say, “I’m fine!” and smile at everyone again this Sunday!!!
  - d. If you are not honest about where you are at, you are never going to experience the true joy of God!
  - e. We must admit to ourselves, if we need to, that all is not “FINE”!

**B. Articulate Your Doubts Clearly**

1. Saying, “Yeah, I doubt a lot of stuff” doesn’t cut it!
2. If you are going to handle this Giant carefully, you have to be precise. Describe your doubt and then start dealing with it!
  - a. Problem with the Resurrection? Did it really happen? Check historical documents and decide if you are going to trust the Bible.
  - b. Problem trusting the Bible? You are not alone. Study it and the history of it’s writing and listen to the end of this message...
  - c. Struggling with how evil fits into a world with a loving God? That one’s been argued throughout history ... take time to look up what others have said.
  - d. What about different faiths? Do a comparison.
3. You have to know clearly *what* you doubt and *why* you doubt it or you will not get anywhere.

**C. Acknowledge Your Doubts Prayerfully**

1. Please understand that God can handle whatever doubts you have.
2. Remember Gideon (Judges 6)? Angel of Lord appeared to him and said that the Lord was with him.

- a. “Really? It doesn’t look like it! It looks to me like we are about to be overrun by a gang of criminals we call the Midianites. What ever happened to those miracles we heard from our ancestors about the Lord rescuing our people from slavery in Egypt? If you ask me, I think the Lord has sided with our enemies.”
- b. Then the LORD HIMSELF responded, “Gideon, you have to trust me and I will prove Myself to you!”
3. If the Lord can handle Gideon talking back and Sarah laughing about having a baby and David singing songs about his doubt of God, God can handle you! Go to God with your doubts!”

**D. Analyze the Evidence Diligently**

1. Some of us fear studying our doubts because we think that our doubts will win and we will somehow prove that God does not exist ... Good luck!
2. 200 years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed that “God is Dead!” He was a smart man, but now we realize that God is still alive and Friedrich Nietzsche is dead!
3. Lawyer named Frank Morison set out to prove that the resurrection of Jesus could not have happened.
  - a. Essentially, as a lawyer, he put the resurrection on trial.
  - b. The more time Frank spent trying to figure out how it could have happened with the historical facts that he brought up, the more he had to come back to the Biblical explanation.
  - c. Morison ended up writing a book called, *Who Moved the Stone?* This text has become a classic in explaining the factual resurrection of Jesus Christ.
4. Don’t be afraid to challenge what you doubt. God will come through!

**E. Accept the Limitations Humbly**

1. Please understand that we can only deal with so much of our doubt. Regardless of what we learn and do and study, life will always have some mystery to it.
2. I’m thankful that we are not in charge of the universe ... as mean and cruel and ignorant as people can be, I think it’s good that we have to bow humbly to Someone else as God.
3. A couple of ways I think we are limited and need to accept:
  - a. ***Accept our own limitations*** = There is no way I can know it all. My brain does not have the capacity to understand everything about the world we live in. I’m limited.

- b. ***Accept the Bible's Limitations*** = I believe that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe that all we need to be who God wants us to be is in the Bible. All of the meat and potatoes for living this life out as people who intend to live throughout eternity are in the Bible; BUT, the Bible does not cover all the little stuff. People ask me, "Stan, what does the Bible say about this or that?" And at times I have to tell people that God's Word doesn't really cover that. We need to take what we know of God and apply it to whatever issue has come up. The Bible does not cover all the little stuff point blank...
- c. ***Adjust to the Complexity of the Universe*** = Do we understand how small we are compared to this world, this solar system, this galaxy, this universe? If you think about it, does it help you appreciate the incredible majesty of God? Isaiah 55 reminds us that we don't think or exist on the same playing field that God does. His thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not His ways. If we really think about it, you and I don't know very much compared to God. There is mystery and we won't have all the answers in this life!

Someone once said, "Doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs." I think that is good advice. Remember how Jesus finished the conversation with Thomas ... "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway." It's called the Christian Faith, not the Christian Knowledge. At some point we need to set aside our doubts and BELIEVE!

Next Week: The Scariest Giant of All!

Let's Pray!