

SCRIPTURE (New Revised Standard Version) John 10:22–32

At that time, the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?"

My husband and I were recently watching one of the many, many dramas on Netflix – this particular one was a crime drama about a teenage girl who had been found dead in the woods of Luxembourg. Through the closed captioning translation, we tried to figure out who had killed this unfortunate woman. First, the show led us to believe it was the stepfather. Wrong. Next, the show intimated that it was drug-related. No. Was it the mother? The Father? Classmates? For too many episodes, Mike and I quickly fell into the rabbit hole of this show. At the last scene on the show's last episode, we found out it was...the twin sister! The twin sister? We thought we had it figured out, and then we did not, then we did, then we rode the rollercoaster of doubt. We commented that they could have saved us several hours of our time and just told us who did it.

The real-life drama in John 10:22-23 commenced with some Jewish people gathered around Jesus as he was walking in the temple. They wanted answers-just tell us straight, they

said. Are you the Messiah or not? The suspense is killing us! And Jesus gave them a straight answer- "I have told you and you have not believed." I do my Father's work, and you see it for yourselves, yet you doubt.

There is nothing inherently wrong with doubt. We all doubt. We doubt our parenting abilities. We doubt our faith in God. We doubt we can pass a test. It is a natural response of human beings.

Many of us like to insert ourselves as the wise sheep in the story; we fluff up our curly locks and puff out our chests while Jesus explains to the crowd how his sheep hear his voice and how Jesus recognizes his sheep. Would we have known if Jesus was the Messiah if we were there at the temple that day? Sure, we can read the account and insert ourselves as the sheep; however, we know the entire story. What if you did not see the outcome?

I am not convinced we can be overly critical of the Jewish men in this scenario, simply because we are no different. "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." How many times have we said to someone, 'just tell me the truth.' 'I want straight answers.' In many instances, we are implying that we do not want to be in doubt anymore. It is as if we are holding our breath since there is misgiving in the air.

Jesus' cousin John asked a similar question regarding the identity of the Messiah in Matthew 11:2-6. "When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers[c] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." John was sitting in a crude prison cell awaiting his fate for speaking the truth. Whether he was alone or with others, it does not

matter. Doubt began to creep into his mind. Through all the years of hopeful anticipation of a savior, the true identity of the Messiah weighed heavy on John's heart and mind. Was Jesus the one-or should he look for another? And rather than say yes, John, I am the one, Jesus commanded John's disciples to report all of the miracles happening at the hands of Jesus. Tell John what I am doing, said Jesus. He will then have an answer to his question.

Tsunamis and doubt have something in common. Listen to the definition of a tsunami. Tsunamis are giant waves caused by earthquakes or volcanic eruptions under the sea. Out in the depths of the ocean, tsunami waves do not dramatically increase in height. But as the waves travel inland, they build up to higher and higher heights as the depth of the ocean decreases. The speed of tsunami waves depends on ocean depth rather than the distance from the wave source. Tsunami waves may travel as fast as jet planes over deep waters, only slowing down when reaching shallow waters. Doubt often acts in the same manner. A small question begins to form in our minds. Maybe it is something like, should I quit my job? Should I keep my job? What school do my kids need to attend? Should I break up with my current relationship or should I stay? The undercurrent of doubt begins to build. We stew and fret, pace and ponder, and the waves of doubt become higher and faster. The doubt is a 100-foot wave in our minds before we know it, and we are beside ourselves. God, tell me what to do!

And God, who welcomes our doubts with open arms, replies, "I have told you, but you do not believe." Or God says, look around at what you hear and see. The lame walk. The blind have sight. Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. Be still, and know that I am God. There is safety in a multitude of counselors. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. If they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not

have another to help. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. Trusting in God and God's word with our doubts can feel a little bit like bungee jumping off of the Royal Gorge Bridge in Colorado, which by the way, is 955 feet to the Arkansas River below. But living with perpetual doubt and anxiety can feel as though you are living in a prison cell or being awash in the waves of a tsunami. When you allow God to walk with you, perhaps you can begin to release your grip on those doubts and hand them over to God.

I read a suggestion where one could write their doubts down on a piece of paper and lay them at the front of the altar at church, and leave them there. Since we are not meeting in person this week, perhaps those of you who are experiencing doubt could write them down and put them in a bowl, a jar, a baggie-anywhere that would symbolize the release of your doubt to God.

And here is the hard part-you leave them where you put them in the hands of Jesus. Jesus can handle your doubts, little-sized or Thomas-sized. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Jesus said, ok. See and feel and believe. And to all of us, Jesus says, bring your doubts to me and know I will take care of you.

Finally, let me tell you the story of a bit of doubt of my own. In August of 2020, I began my internship here at Greenland Hills with a bang. After a sleepless night with doubt starting my first day, I drove to the church, used my key to open the door, and sat down...to silence. As I pondered why there were no cars in the parking lot and no people in the building, my eye caught a sign for the pre-school hours-9:00 a.m. Tuesday-Friday. It was Monday. If ever doubt felt as though I was in a tsunami, this was the day. Experience has taught me over the years to believe that God will take care of me, and God has during this internship experience. From the kind, wise, and guiding hand of Pastor Kerry; Trish, who was able to answer my questions, Kristin

Mallory, who made me feel welcome; and Robert and Kristi, whose musical talent had me in continuous awe, it has been a privilege to be an intern at Greenland Hills. The Lay Teaching Committee, headed by Sharon Bradley with Howard, Suzette, Sean, Kate, and Kathy, was indeed the best committee anyone could ask. As I end my internship next month, I say thank you for allowing this person, full of doubt, for entering your lives and be a part of your community.