

# “Where’s the Beef?”

April 27, 2025

“Where’s the beef?”

“Trust, but verify!”

“Show me!”

“Beyond a shadow of a doubt.”

“Mrs. Doubtfire.”

Doubt and certainty fill our daily lives.

Many of us still recall the Wendy’s ad: “Show me the beef!” Three older ladies examine a huge hamburger bun; they lift off the lid revealing a tiny beef patty emphasizing the skimpy meal. One befuddled oldster repeats over and over, “Where’s the Beef?” The commercial assures us this abomination would never happen at Wendy’s.

We watched President Reagan negotiate pivotal nuclear disarmament treaties. A history professor taught him an easy Russian proverb. Afterward, meeting with President Mikhail Gorbachev, he repeated “Trust but verify” at every meeting.

A Missouri legislator in the early 1900s lamented the use of “frothy language” that sounded good, but lacked truth. He demanded that they “show me” the truth, later printed onto all Missouri state license plates.

On jury duty, we must weigh all the facts carefully. We judge guilt or innocence “beyond a shadow of a doubt.”

We watched Robin Williams play Mrs. Doubtfire, a character who was not as she appeared. Yet we loved her anyway.

We deal with doubt and certainty everyday. We wisely maintain a “healthy dose of skepticism” - the ability to know whether an explanation makes sense, based on the evidence we observe.

Our doubts may protect us from things we fear most. Perhaps a hidden swindle in an email link. Sweepstakes winnings if we only submit a gift card. Offers simply too good to be true, so we wisely decline.

When we’re afraid, we tend to doubt more and think less. Our ability to think clearly, if not creatively, steeply falls away. Perhaps that’s why Thomas skeptically refutes the disciples’ stories of the risen Christ.

Our reading for today portrays Thomas as the eternal doubter. Perhaps, he would have adopted the phrase “trust but verify.” But we find that Thomas carries the moniker perhaps unjustly.

Getting back to the scripture, Jesus has died and risen in the last three days. The disciples understandably meet behind locked doors. They fear their own executions just by association with Jesus. Scripture tells us they fear the “Jews.” But let’s be careful here. Everyone who believes in the Hebrew God is Jewish, even the recently executed Jesus, although the followers of Jesus interpret Jewish law very differently than traditional Jews. There are no Christians yet, because the early church is just birthing.

It would be fairer to say that the disciples fear the Jewish leaders collaborating with Roman authorities to get rid of Jesus. They could be next; hence, the locked doors.

To their astonishment (I daresay we would be no different), Jesus visits them in the room, locked doors or not. He immediately greets them with “Shalom,” a common wish for bringing God’s peace to those in the room. He understands their fear, seeking to comfort them. Without any prompting, Jesus shows those present his wounds from the crucifixion. The disciples stare at his arms and side yet feel overwhelming peace and oneness with encountering the living Christ. Just a few hours earlier, they had chided Mary Magdalene with her announcement of a similar experience at the empty tomb.

Thomas unfortunately did not participate in this meeting. Who knows where he was? He could have been grieving the loss of his good friend. Perhaps, he too searched for a hiding place for his own safety. He may have been attending to the poor or sick. The gospel writer makes no comment on his absence.

Days later, the disciples regale Thomas with stories of their encounter. Humanly, Thomas rejects their explanation of events. He may have been just a little hurt that Jesus appeared to Mary and the other disciples, but skipped him. He had been a model disciple among them. But apparently not good enough for Jesus’ visitation. He does not reject Jesus. After all, just a few chapters before this event, Thomas strongly supported Jesus’ mission in spite of the other disciples’ scorn.

Let’s go back to the story of Lazarus. Jesus wants to restore the dead man to life. The other disciples scoff at Jesus’ concern. They claim “Surely, he is only asleep. He will awaken in a few hours. No need to go out of our way.” Yet it was Thomas who supports Jesus: “Let us go with him.” He even utters that he would be willing to die with Jesus.

Even closer to the upper room story, Thomas pleads with Jesus to better understand him. Jesus had just claimed he will go ahead to prepare a future room for them. Far from contradicting Jesus, Thomas simply asks how they will be able to find him. No room for doubt: Thomas will follow Jesus wherever it takes him, including death.

Thomas meets up with the disciples a week later. He hears their excited stories; he witnesses their transformation. Rather than afraid in a locked room, they clearly share their experience of joining the resurrected Christ. Thomas desperately wants that too. Perhaps he wonders why the

others witnessed such an extraordinary event, but it didn't happen for him. But then it does happen; Jesus comes back for Thomas.

Jesus offers his wounds directly to Thomas. Rather than grope his limbs, Thomas simply falls before him proclaiming Jesus as his Lord and Savior. This is all about personal connection. He has grown in Jesus as Jesus has with him.

Jesus asks a very important question: "Do you believe because you have seen the wounds?" Jesus directs the question to Thomas, but also to us. Would we believe only if we had seen the wounds directly? It may seem impossible as we live in far different times. But what wounds do we see now?

Jesus suffered at the hands of Roman soldiers nailing him to the cross, piercing his arms and side. Was it just a few soldiers carrying out an order or were they, too, caught up in an overwhelming empire? Was it an empire that routinely used fear to get what it wanted? Fear of execution for anyone objecting to Roman Rule – soldiers and peasants alike? After all, the empire demanded tribute to support itself. Peasants paid in temple taxes and subsidies – most of their crops went to the elites. Death, especially, awaited those who would challenge the emperor himself. Jesus continually contrasted the Roman empire to the Kingdom of God. His words alone made him a political target.

As the body of Christ, we will have wounds too. Our communities carry wounds. We need not see Jesus' personal wounds to understand how empires use violence to control the poor. We only need look at the suffering among us. Poor people choosing between rent and groceries. Children suffering diseases easily avoided by vaccinations. Gay men mocked for holding hands in public. Migrants hiding behind doors for fear of losing their families. Prisoners living in a small cellblock for 23 hours each day. Most of us have larger bathrooms, let alone our freedom.

Doubts will creep in. Without doubt we would never question our assumptions, seeking a higher level of understanding. Doubt propels us to question the status quo and seek a better fit. That's especially true in our faith life, too. We may question the religious training we received as children. We may question why some religions denigrate same-sex relationships or the rights of minority groups. As long as we question and seek answers, not giving to cynicism, but refining our understanding, we will gain the same trust that Thomas knew all along.

This week we celebrated Earth Day and our work in Creation Care through the Wisconsin Conference UCC. Years before Earth Day, few people worried about the environment. Soot-darkened skies from factories represented progress and power. Rather than wonder whether some people would suffer ill effects living near polluted streams, we accepted that "the solution to pollution was dilution" – diverting waste into our streams, rivers, lakes and oceans. Until some began to doubt the progress of living with pollution.

Doubters watched in horror as a river flowing into Lake Erie caught on fire. Doubters fought back against the plastic islands in the Pacific Ocean – tangled waste islands miles long. We ourselves doubted the fish die-offs in the Fox River.

As people became aware of the dangers facing us, they lobbied for intervention. The Environmental Protection Agency spawned projects to protect our natural resources; indeed, the agency identified the Fox River as a toxic clean-up site. Our own Creation Care Team in the Wisconsin Conference UCC provides funding to churches seeking energy conservation remedies. We have a new solar panel on our roof, harnessing renewable energy. Cathy Putman continually reworks the soils and plants of the Biblical Garden to be in harmony with the natural landscape. All of these are examples of the positive power of doubt, of how doubt can be leveraged to bring about transformation.

When we let fear and doubt derail our beliefs, we give up the opportunity to strengthen our faith or forge new paths. Some of us may have found that we are carrying long-held beliefs that no longer support our concepts of justice. Perhaps some of these beliefs have even blocked us from finding Jesus altogether. We need doubt as the catalyst of inquiry. Questioning helps us to grow our faith. The quest for faith continues and the same question remains: “Do we need proof for faith to flourish?”

All too often we only hear the calls of empire: “Trust but Verify,” “Show Me!” “Where’s the Beef?”

Had it not been for Thomas, we would never have witnessed the trust he gained with his encounter of the risen Christ. As Jesus brought peace to Mary, the disciples and Thomas, and hopefully those of us gathered here today, we can share Jesus’ greeting with others: “Shalom, my friends, shalom.”

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**Psalm 118:1-8, 19-28; John 20:19-31**  
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