

Thomas is so relatable. In our gospel story today Thomas is in the midst of this gathering of Jesus and the disciples, dear friends and faithful followers. They're all hanging out and learning from Jesus and all of a sudden Jesus starts talking about "the place where he is going" and a lot of other cryptic-sounding messages. Thomas is the guy who wants to take a second, just to clarify what his teacher and friend is saying, because it's pretty out there, even for Jesus. In other Gospel accounts, he's even referred to as "Doubting Thomas". Fortunately then, another disciple, Philip, decides to be bold in his curiosity too and ask for more clarification - if we could just see the Father, we would understand better, he says to Jesus. But of course, that's not the way that faith works. Our curiosity grows our faith, our persistence in pursuing Christ's meaning grows our faith as well.

But it's hard to be curious when parts of your foundation are shaken up. It's hard to rely on faith that things will be okay when so many things are confusing and need clarifying.

Especially these days, when we are surrounded by masses of information that can seem convoluted or frustrating, despairing or continually life-altering, it makes so much sense that we have questions and certain things are hard to believe.

Thomas, of course, is referring to what seems impossible, that through Jesus we see God the Father. That truly God is within Jesus, and whoever goes through Jesus, lives in Christ, then the heavenly kingdom and the place to where Jesus is going will be revealed. What makes this passage even more confusing, is that this interaction takes place even before the Easter story. Christ has not died - yet. Christ is foretelling his own death and eventual ascension, so no wonder Thomas is super confused. Also, thank you Bill for reading this Gospel so well - it's repetitive and talks in circles and repeats a lot of similar words in slightly altered orders.

But even though it seems like Jesus is talking in circles, even though Thomas and Philip are understandably confused and likely at least a bit

concerned, Jesus' words in this passage give us two central truths on which to rely. Two central truths about who Christ is and what Christ does. Jesus is the way to God, our Father. And Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Pairing this Gospel text with the reading from 1 Peter helps us to understand these truths even better. So here's what we learn from these texts. Here is what we need to know about how God works today - the stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone of a whole new world. The rejected stone became the pillar, the cornerstone, that holds the whole new thing up. The whole new structure, the whole new way of being.

See, this is how God works in us and with us. God sees that the world can reject us, that we can reject ourselves with low self-worth, low self-esteem, low confidence, and self-hatred, that we all feel some sort of rejection throughout our time in this world. But God still sees us. God comes to us in our very cores, our own foundations and still chooses us. We are never the rejected pieces of creation, we are chosen by God to live and live abundantly. God chooses us over and over again because we are God's beloved people, God's very own children to whom God shows endless, truly endless, love and grace and mercy. God is the very foundation in each of us that gives us the strength to be that cornerstone. To wherever we are called in life we have the power of God to strengthen and sustain us beyond what we could dream. God never rejects us, God chooses us even in our brokenness, even in our moments of rejection, even in our moments when we feel useless or unworthy or helpless or any other feeling of being discarded. We are NOT discarded. We are SO loved, so worthy of love and grace and mercy and strength and peace and we need these promises of God and the work of God alone to help us through it.

God's strength is what strengthens us. God's power of new life is what builds up our very cores. God knows this is possible for each of us and gives us the strength we need to carry on in any and all situations. God will

never abandon or forsake us, God continues to choose us. We are the body of Christ in the world, the way to God is through our human experience, loving and serving God and our neighbors. It is because of Jesus' humanity and divinity that we are so close to God. God knows our human hearts and loves us. God empathizes with our human experience through the human life of Jesus Christ. Jesus knows what it is to be rejected on the deepest levels, betrayed by his own people, denied by his beloved friend, even when it meant his torture and death. And yet it is that same Christ who felt the deepest pain of deepest rejection who rose to new life and is the cornerstone of life for all people. Jesus' rejection leads to new life - Jesus' rejection becomes the cornerstone of a whole new world of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Christ is our cornerstone of faith. Christ is our hope amidst the chaos. Christ is our way, our truth, and our life.

From this place of strength, this cornerstone of our faith, given to us as a blessing and gift of God, we can then be blessings to the rest of the world around us. This is what it is to love God and from that place of God's love, love our neighbors as well. God's love for us is our sure foundation in our lives. No matter what we face, no matter what ways we feel rejected or forlorn God still chooses us and empowers us in love as the cornerstone in our lives. From recognizing and strengthening this loving relationship, with spiritual practices and a deep sense of faith, we are then free to love our neighbors in the best ways we can. Loving our neighbors happens in a whole lot of ways that we may never have forseen these days. Staying physically distant, wearing masks, supporting healthcare workers and researchers, essential services and infrastructure workers, are just some of the ways that we are adjusting to new ways of loving our neighbors and living into the calling to love one another. And we are doing beautiful, bold, and radical work of love these days, which is saving lives, and for which we can give thanks.

Acting from the love that God first gave us is how Jesus Christ is our way, our truth, and our life. God gave Jesus to us, every single one of us in the whole world, God's only Son's life and resurrection for our sake. There is no greater love than this. And this is the truth - that we are never separated from the love that God has given us. The love that saves us. The love that gives us life. Jesus' death and new life is the way to knowing God's deep and enduring love for us. And our very lives depend on the powerful hope that comes in Jesus' life, the new life that we proclaim as Easter people.

So even in the midst of all the change, in the midst of all the confusion and frustration and grief and all the other complicated things going on around us, we have two truths on which to rely. Christ leads us to God the Father, and Jesus is our way, our truth, and our life. Christ calls us to love God and love our neighbors and following Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, is the best way to live into this calling of love in our hearts and in our spirits. Let's continue to love our neighbors as best we can, protecting the most vulnerable around us, and rest in the fact that God's love is our foundation. Let not our hearts be troubled. God continues to choose us, even in our moments of rejection or feeling low, and we must trust in the goodness and strength of God in all things. Jesus is the cornerstone of the whole world, the epitome of spiritual strength, whose rejection leads to new life, and that life is for the love of the whole world. Thanks be to God, Amen.