



theme: Doubt #1 – Give Me Proof – John 20
materials: Bibles, paper, pencils

welcome

What's the most "unbelievable" or "unlikely" thing you have ever seen or had happen to you? Have you ever tried to tell someone about it (or about anything else) and they wouldn't believe you? How did you try and convince them? Do people generally believe what you say to be true? Do you usually believe what other people say, or do you need proof?

interact

Read out Matthew 21:21-22. Do you have any doubts about God? What is something that has been told to you, or that you read in the Bible, that you don't understand, or you have questions about? Have each person write one of these things down on a piece of paper and hold onto it. Pray together, honestly sharing doubts before each other and God, asking for God to help us all to have faith to move mountains. Even if we have questions, what are the things you can say you believe about Jesus? Go around and share just one thing you believe about Jesus (it's ok if someone is unsure and wants to pass). Write what you believe about Jesus on the other side of your piece of paper.

read

Read John 20:1-31 together.

In this passage we have the story of the empty tomb after Jesus' resurrection, and then three different encounters with the risen Jesus. What do you think your reaction to the risen Jesus would have been? (If you can't imagine Jesus, imagine a friend or relative of yours coming back from the dead). Would it be more like Mary's, the disciples', or Thomas' reaction?

Why do you think Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen, when his friends were so convinced they had seen him alive? Is his skepticism reasonable?

What is Jesus' reaction to Thomas' doubt?

What is Thomas' reaction to seeing Jesus in the flesh? Why does he call Jesus his Lord and God?

Do you call Jesus your Lord and God? What does that mean to you?

How can you believe something if you have not seen it? None of us, presumably, have seen Jesus in the flesh.

Why should we believe that these things written about Jesus are true?

Do you believe they are true? Why or why not?

What is the result of believing that Jesus is the Son of God, according to John? (v. 31)

think

How do you suspect you would react if Jesus were to come in the door during cell and show you his wounds? How do you think your life would be different? Make a conscious effort to live your life that way this week, and share next week at cell how it was different. (Remember, many of the disciples, after seeing the risen Jesus, went on to lead lives that led to their martyrdom!)



live & pray

1. Ask some friends this week to tell you one thing they believe that other people might find hard to accept.
2. Ask them then to tell you one thing they believe, or think they know, about Jesus.
3. If you're brave, ask them what it would take for them to believe that Jesus came back from the dead. Then maybe share with them the story of Jesus.

useful resources

- Website: <http://urbanlegends.about.com/b/a/256559.htm> - A site devoted to debunking urban myths and legends.
- Movie: *Contact* – an interesting movie about science and faith.
- Movie: *KPAX* – is the main character who he claims to be?

leader's guide

Thomas, who has inherited the nickname “Doubting Thomas” as a result of this story, seems to be exhibiting quite rational doubt here. He knew full well what had happened to Jesus, and also knew full well that in the normal course of events, dead people did not come back to life. Yet he is here displayed as someone perhaps not displaying the correct attitude of faith. Why? Jesus was not a normal person, and Thomas knew this as well. Thomas must have been around for miracles, and maybe even saw Jesus raise people from the dead himself. His faith must therefore have been severely shaken by the crucifixion and the death of the dream Jesus’ followers had concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God. So Thomas’ doubt is more about the person of Jesus and the coming of his Kingdom than about something so simple as coming back from the dead. Jesus had not done it the way Thomas expected, and so he lost his faith in the message of Christ. That is why it so significant that Thomas responds to Jesus now with the words “My Lord and my God!” Thomas’s faith in Jesus and his kingdom has been restored. Jesus’ reaction to Thomas’ doubt is instructive. He does not condemn him. He submits to his request to see and touch his wounds. Jesus did not have to do this, and infers that he would prefer not to, as those who believe without seeing will be blessed, but he still acts lovingly and graciously towards Thomas. There are legitimate historical reasons for believing the stories of the Bible to be reflective of what happened, but we should also remember that these stories were presented by the gospel writers to get across a particular message. They are written so that readers might believe in Christ. But the stories would most likely have been already familiar to many people and communities through oral histories and other kept writings. So the written gospel stories themselves were not the original basis for faith – Christ and his resurrection were. But the stories were written to reinforce belief and to give other people new reason to believe in Christ. We are very far removed now from the time of Christ, and so these are the first-hand accounts that we have. But we are not removed from the Holy Spirit, who is present with all believers. So it is reasonable to accept the gospels as historical sources, but true living faith comes from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. As it says in 1 Cor 12:3, “...no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”