Wow. Believing. Where do you start? It’s hard to think of a word or an idea that has fallen on harder times, than the word believing, or believe. A word that has been stripped of almost any meaning. We live in a world now where people will believe anything. What I believe is what I believe and what you believe is what you believe, and everyone believes what’s right for them. What is a better definition of chaos? The absurdity of what people associate with believing knows no bounds in our culture today. And we speak authoritatively on beliefs that we have never examined or think much about. The Russians and other countries are flooding Facebook and other social media with all kinds just made up stuff. Because they know that we will believe just about anything. Won’t get specific about the last election except to say that people will believe anything they hear. What is a word that blocks us from seeking the truth these days more than believing? Well, that’s what I believe. You can believe whatever you want. Door closed.

People say they believe in the Bible. Our first lesson today talks about believing. Let’s just read it. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. The Holy Spirit has just come upon these people and that’s what believing is. Anyone believe in the Bible and what it says about believing? The Bible says it , so I believe it. Really? Believing seems often based on what I like. I’ve heard people say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you believe”. Believing becomes whatever you want to believe in. We’re in big trouble at this point in history with this whole business of believing. Well, I believe. So we need to look at this pretty carefully. Make some sense out of believing. Because right now, believing means almost nothing.

Our religious traditions have actually deal with what all of this is, in terms of a consequence of sin. This way that people will believe anything they hear or anything they want to believe has a very specific term and I’ll put it up on the screen for you see, and then I’ll define it. And hopefully this will be the beginning of a more believable approach to this notion of what it means to believe. Here’s the word. It’s called credulity, or credulous. And here’s the definition of this particular form of sin. Just google it and here’s the definition. Credulity is a tendancy to be too ready to believe that something is true. Too ready to believe. Too willing to believe anything. I just fall for it. It’s a character trait.

We laugh in the movies at people who bought the snake oil pitch right? Or people who are suckers for a quick rich scheme. Ocean front property in Arizona. But in one way or another the credulous person loses their capacity for discernment, and has this need to jump on board way too easily. Too ready to believe. I don’t like a particular political candidate. So I’m just a sucker for any news that makes him or her look bad. Or any news that makes my political candidate look good, I believe it. This sin is just tearing our country apart right now. It applies of course in other areas. You can be an employee who is just too eager to please. You want the relationship so bad that you believe things about your partner that just aren’t true. This is the credulous person, that person who is too ready to believe. You could say gullible. The sin of credulity.

This is really true about God. There are lot’s of people I think who believe in God way too easily. It’s fine when you are child. 1 Corinthians 13. “When I was child I thought like a child, I spoke like a child. But when I became a man Paul says, I gave up my childish ways.” Some people don’t give it up. Our lesson is from the Gospel of John and I’ll read to you out of the Gospel of John where this happens early in Jesus ministry. Jesus runs into the credulous right away. It’s one of the first issues that he deals with. This is John Chapter 3, beginning at verse 23. Jesus has been doing all these signs and wonders, and standing up against the authorities. Listen, this is interesting. “When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone, for he himself knew what was in everyone. In other words, these folks are all in on Jesus, but he isn’t buying it. Why? Too ready to believe. Oh wow, Jesus, we believe. They were just all in instantly. They have created a Jesus in their minds that they want to believe in, this God who is going to come in and fix everything. And they want that so badly, they jump on board way too easily, and buy into so much that is simply not true. Too ready to believe. The sin of credulousness. You want something so badly that you will believe anything.

Why does this happen? Well I think it happens when we’re afraid and insecure. Let’s say I’m financially poor and have a lot of bills to pay. At that point I might be more susceptible to a get rich quick scam right? If your ill you might be susceptible to all kinds of healing scams. I’m so afraid of the liberals or the conservatives that I’ll believe anything that puts them in a bad light. Credulousness comes from fear and anxiety I think.

But when it comes to believing in God, there can be one particular thing that we are really afraid of. One particular thing that make us really insecure and anxious. And this of course is the reality of doubt. Maybe what I believe isn’t true. Maybe what I was taught isn’t right. That can be a very scary thing to even think for some I think. The way I grew up in the church, doubt was a sign of unbelief. And that could lead you to a very bad place. Like Forever. With that kind of anxiety and insecurity, no wonder we can be too ready to believe. Too willing to believe anything that will take away the doubts that I might have. I remember when I was a kid, about every 5 years or so, someone would pass around this picture of a mountain. And if you looked at the mountain glacier just right, you could see what might be the tip of a ship. Real fuzzy. And the credulous would say, see? It’s Noah’s ark. They just haven’t been able to get to that place yet. Oh man, did they believe. These were the insecure, who needed to avoid doubt and had such a need to believe that they just jumped on board too easily. Don’t see that picture too much anymore.

Which leads to our Gospel lesson. Every year it comes up. The story of Doubting Thomas it’s called. But perhaps today we might look at Thomas in a much more positive light. Because he didn’t succumb to the sin of credulity did he? He didn’t believe too easily. And guess what happened. He learned what believing was all about. Doubt here leads to believing. He had the courage and guts to say even when everybody else said Jesus was alive. Uh, not so fast. I need to check this out. Man do we need this in our world today, we really need what Thomas brings today. And surely when Jesus says blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe, he’s doesn’t mean to be credulous. Too believe blindly. Thomas is a great role model for todays world. Don’t believe to easily. And don’t be afraid of your doubts. See what’s the antidote to our crazy world today where people will believe anything? What’s the way out? Yup, it’s doubt.

Doubt opens up believing. Without doubt we’re in big trouble. We can take many examples of this from real life. How did the Europeans discover America? How did they come to believe that there was this land that they had never thought about before? Well, one day, some person began to doubt that the world was flat. It just got under his or her skin I guess. And this doubt led to some experiments. And interest, and wondering. And out of journey started by doubt came something that the European world had never believed before. That the earth wasn’t flat, it was round. Doubt lead to believing something new. What about our church? Martin Luther grew up in the church and somewhere along the way he began to doubt what he was learning. And it wasn’t just him, but his doubt led to what? Our church. Our church began with doubt. Somewhere along the way, someone began to doubt that women shouldn’t vote. Somewhere along the way, someone began to doubt that blood just didn’t sit there in your body, but was pumped around by your heart.

What kind of world would we have if no one had doubted? If everyone just believed what they were taught. Doubt isn’t the opposite of believing. Doubt is the doorway to believing. To believing in a God who will help you see something you’ve never seen before. Or understood before. Surely you have some doubts about God. What could possibly be a better way to learn about God than to explore them? The doubts of Thomas led him straight to Jesus. There is not a better way to discover God than to explore your doubts. It’s interest that this story is here right after the resurrection. Maybe it’s to help us to avoid the sin of credulity. Of believing too easily, when we are invited to explore our questions and be honest about our doubts. What kind of a church would that be. A great place to experience the love of God I bet.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. What is believing again? No doubts, no questions? Or the courage to ask them? To explore them? What do you think would lead to a better experience of God with us? Doubt as the open door to learning, growing, thinking, repenting.

We live in a crazy world where people are so insecure and afraid that they will believe just about anything they hear. If it’s on Facebook it must be true. Dear God, help us to be more like Thomas. Not so willing to just jump on board out of our insecurity. Amen.