Several years ago, at a clergy conference, I was part of a small group discussion. The other priests were discussing, somewhat critically, those who do not believe in a literal, physical, bodily resurrection. Suddenly one of them jumped up, and one by one, stood in front of each of us, pointing his finger, and asking, “Do you believe in the resurrection?” He came to me and I said, “Yes!”

Have you ever been in a group discussion, something gets said, and you just tune out and begin a conversation with yourself? Well, that’s what I did. It went something like this. “Of course, I believe in the resurrection. I’ve been saying the creeds and professing resurrection for more than twenty years. Besides that, I am a priest. I believe in the resurrection.” And then it was, “Well, I think I believe in the resurrection.” And then, “I want to believe in the resurrection.” And finally, “What does believing in the resurrection mean anyway?”

You may not have had that exact conversation with yourself but I’ll bet you’ve had questions and struggles with the resurrection. I think we all do. The disciples certainly did. Every gospel account of the resurrection also speaks of not believing. Evangelist Luke told us the disciples thought the women’s words about the resurrection were “an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Lk. 24:11). Matthew says that the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had directed them. There they saw Jesus, he says, “but some doubted” (Mt. 28:17). The longer ending of Mark says the disciples “would not believe” that Jesus was alive or that Mary Magdalene had seen him (Mk. 16:11) and when two others reported seeing Jesus “they did not believe them” (Mk. 16:12).

And then there’s today’s gospel and what are the disciples doing? They are not shouting, “Alleluia. Christ is risen.” “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.” No. They are hiding, they are afraid. They’ve locked the doors of their house. They’ve closed their minds and hearts to the resurrection. They are locked in fear. That’s when Jesus shows up, speaks “Peace be with you” to them, shows them his hands and his side and eats a piece of broiled fish.

Later we’ll see disciple Thomas, the one who is called the Twin says, “I will not believe” has become the personification of every one who has ever struggled to believe the resurrection. We can pretty easily identify Thomas’ struggle to believe with our own. We’ve even renamed him after that struggle, Doubting Thomas. That’s how we’ve come to know him.

While Thomas is often criticized and talked about as not believing, I think he has something to teach us. Thomas offers some wisdom in the midst of our struggling to believe the resurrection.

Where was Thomas Easter evening when Jesus showed up the first time? What was he doing? Was he out looking for Jesus? Did he go back to the tomb? Was he hiding somewhere else? Was he running away? Why did he come back to the house a week after Easter?

Maybe coming back is how we who have not seen come to believe. Believing is not what fills the gap between a statement of faith and our inability to explain, understand, make sense of, or prove that statement. It’s what allows us to stand in that gap. Coming back is the beginning of coming to believe. Coming back is what keeps us present and open to Jesus coming back.

So let me ask you this. What hope keeps you coming back? What are your deepest longings that keep you coming back?

I don’t know what keeps you coming back. Whatever it is, don’t stop. Maybe it doesn’t even really matter why, how, or when we come back, only that we do.

Let’s be honest. This resurrection thing is brand new for everybody; not just the disciples but Jesus too. We struggle with believing and Jesus just keeps on showing up. Our struggle to believe and Jesus’ showing up seem to be two sides of the same thing. It’s in every one of the gospels.

We struggle to believe and Jesus keeps on coming back. He came back from the dead. He came back to the disciples Easter evening. He came back to them a week later. He just keeps on coming back. Amen.