

Acts 2:14a, 22-32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Poor Thomas—he doesn't deserve to be the only one called "doubting." The other eleven disciples doubted. Mary Magdalene doubted, until she saw Jesus herself in the garden. We all doubt. But Jesus says we are blessed if we believe without having seen. So let's have a look.

In thinking about this story, it helps to remember that it takes place on the Sunday evening of Jesus's resurrection. Remember, just that morning Mary Magdalene had told the apostles the amazing story of her encounter with the risen Jesus in the garden. In writing this story, John doesn't *say* that the disciples didn't believe Mary Magdalene, but the fact that they're all locked in a room that evening, out of fear of the temple authorities, indicates that they probably didn't believe her. If they had believed, they would probably have been proclaiming Jesus's resurrection. But they *are* afraid, and doubting Mary's story. So when Jesus miraculously appears in this locked room, his first utterance is, "Peace be with you."

"Peace be with you." In other words, he's saying you don't have to be afraid, you don't have to doubt, because I am here with you again. Then he breathes the Holy Spirit on them, which is what God did to animate human beings in creation. This infusion of the Spirit comes with authority, however: "if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This is huge, because in Jewish theology of that time, only God could forgive sins. So Jesus is making them partners in his divinity, in a way, and further equipping them for spreading his message.

Again, poor Thomas. He wasn't there for this remarkable visit, and so when the apostles tell him, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas wants to see and touch Jesus for himself. Isn't that understandable, though? Don't

we usually want evidence to support people's claims? And I want to point out that almost all of the named disciples have doubted Jesus, at one time or another. Peter even *denies* Jesus three times, which is worse than doubt. So a week later, when Jesus again appears to them in a locked room, he is happy to tell Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." We see that Jesus doesn't scold Thomas for wanting proof, but gives it willingly. And then Thomas give one of the most resounding declarations of faith in the New Testament when he then calls Jesus "my Lord and my God!"

So Jesus doesn't have issues with Thomas needing to see him to believe. But he does say, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." And my friends, that would be *us*. Most of *us* have not seen Jesus, and most of *us* have come to believe. John, in writing this book, wants us to know that we who have heard the story after the Resurrection *will* be blessed, if we come to believe. John says he writes his gospel, "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing you may have life in his name."

Believing something as remarkable as Jesus's Resurrection doesn't usually happen as a result of intellectual effort, though. Hearing stories, reading theology, listening to sermons isn't usually what makes Jesus more than a name to people. Do you remember when Jesus became more than just a name to you? When was it that Jesus became significant in your life? What caused your heart to soften, and allow God's grace to reach you? Do you remember? Sometimes it's a transcendent experience of some kind. Sometimes it's a special person who helps you see. Music can be a powerful means of grace. Or was it slow and gradual for you?

However it came about that you realized that Jesus is Lord, I want to invite you to focus on Communion this morning. Because we usually need physical things, like wine, bread—and people!—to help us understand spiritual matters, we have sacraments. The sacraments are ways that we can see and touch, and believe. Like Thomas, in a way. The famous definition of a sacrament is that it's "an outward and

physical sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” We eat and drink during Communion as a way of assuring ourselves that Christ is risen, and he is in us, and we are in him.

It’s also helpful to remember that for more than two centuries, people have reported their experience of the resurrected Jesus. People have proclaimed that the post-Easter Jesus is real to them. Millions of people from all walks of life, rich and poor, powerful and oppressed, have said with Mary Magdalene, and the apostles, “I have seen the Lord.” The Church, preaching this message, grew from a small group of largely uneducated disciples, to one of the largest religions on the planet. It seems likely that God is in that somehow.

If there are things about God that you don’t understand, that’s good. If we could understand everything about God, well, God wouldn’t be God. The Divine is, by nature, beyond our complete comprehension. That’s one of the things that makes it divine. It’s not a failure of logic, as someone recently said to me. Divinity so far exceeds logic that rationality can’t fully grasp it.

And it’s always helpful to remember that Jesus doesn’t condemn the doubt. He knows that doubt is not the enemy of faith. And the Episcopal Church knows that we doubt. So we don’t ask you to turn off your brain at the door of the church. We invite you to come and puzzle things out. Come and ask questions. Invite God to help you answer them. Then we can say, like the father who wanted Jesus to heal his son, “Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief.”
Amen.

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