

Second Sunday in Easter
First Trinity Lutheran Church
John 20:19-31
April 7, 2013

Do You Have Doubts?

Doubt is part of life. It is taught to us from an early age. At some point a family member or a close friend tells us a lie, perhaps for good reason. But once we discovered that we had been told a lie the seeds of doubt are planted. And the seeds of doubt grow fast and choke all in their path. The next time they tell us something we question whether it is true and so we doubt.

Doubt, I think, is necessary for survival in this world. Much of our success in science is driven by doubt and as a result the scientist must prove her hypothesis. If we believed everything we were told, we would soon be in trouble. If someone tells us their product is better than another we question their word. If the government tells us to do something, we question their motives. We have all been lied to, so out of self-defense we distrust; we doubt.

Doubt is necessary, but it is also dangerous. Doubt may save us from believing a lie, but it can also keep us from believing the truth. The prime example of doubt in the Bible is Thomas. We often call him "Doubting Thomas," but he is no different from us. We all doubt as he did. Under the same circumstances, we would doubt too. When Jesus first appeared to the disciples Thomas was not there. So when he came back a week later everyone was excited and saying that Jesus was alive.

Consider this from Thomas' point of view. He had seen Jesus crucified. The Romans had nailed him to a cross. First the women and then the rest of the disciples were saying that Jesus was alive. The physical evidence was clear. Jesus had died. We can't blame Thomas for doubting the resurrection. All the other disciples had doubted before they saw Jesus.

We call him "Doubting Thomas," but doubt is only half of his story. The other half of the story is that Thomas came to believe. A week after Jesus appeared to the other Apostles he appeared to Thomas, And in the end Thomas said, "My Lord and My God." Jesus came and changed Thomas. In the end "Believing Thomas" confessed that Jesus was God. God took the prime example of doubt and turned him into an example of belief.

We are all doubting Thomas's. We all doubt, especially concerning religious matters. Perhaps we doubt if we are saved or not, "Do I trust enough? Was I baptized the right way? Is my faith enough or is there something I need to do?" Perhaps we doubt the Bible or the way people interpret it. Is Jesus really present in this bread and wine? We learn two very important things about doubt from Thomas. First of all, doubt is part of the human condition. We all doubt and at times that doubt is even necessary. Even Jesus didn't condemn Thomas for doubting. Second, God can turn doubt into belief.

There are those that will tell you that if you are a believer, then you can't have doubt. They think that doubt is the opposite of belief. But doubt is not the opposite of belief. The opposite of belief is fear. Doubt is the force that pushes us further down the road of belief. It sparks a desire in our mind to know more. Doubt seeks the light. Doubt wants to shine a light into the dark corners; to illuminate them and to clarify them.

As the disciples wait in that upper room, they may very well have had doubts. But doubt is not their problem, their problem is fear. The disciples are paralyzed by their fear; their fear of the Jewish authorities; their fear that they too might suffer the same fate as Jesus. It is important to note that Thomas, the disciple who expresses the most doubt, is also the disciple who expresses the least fear. On the night of Jesus' first appearance, all of the disciples, except Thomas are

huddled together behind locked doors. Thomas, on the other hand, is out on the streets. He is the only one venturing out into the city.

On the second visit when Thomas is there in that upper room Jesus encourages him to "Put his finger in the wound in his hands; put his hand in the wound in his side. At that moment Thomas moves from doubt to belief. And he speaks that belief when he says, "My Lord and my God."

This story illustrates we do not need to be ashamed of our doubt. We do not need to be ashamed of our questions. We can grow from our doubt. We can grow from our questions, so long as they lead us on a path that brings us to a better understanding.

Jesus asks Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" But to us Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The key here is the words "Come to believe." So faith here is not an instantaneous flash of revelation, but a journey. Faith is a journey where we deal with our doubts as we walk forward. The deaf community has a sign for Jesus-it is this sign-. They have picked up on the scars in Jesus' hands as part of his identity. Last Sunday was not the beginning and the end of Easter but Easter continues week in and week out because the work of Jesus hands was carried on by others by Thomas and Peter and John and Mary and Magdalene, as they continued to carry Jesus message of peace to a world waiting for good news.

Easter continues because Jesus hands are our hand now. Our hands are the hands that will heal and touch others who are hurting; our hands will reach out and include all those who have been excluded. Our hands will be the hands that break down the barriers of injustice, our hands will prepare the food bags for those who are hungry, our hands will support those with

disabilities, our hands will bring the love of Jesus to the streets, to the board rooms, to the class rooms, to the war zones, and to the courtrooms.

What matters in the Christian life is not having the perfect doctrine, or faith without doubt, but rather having be willing to enter into a relationship with God. It is this relationship that will change our lives. The experience of Easter is that the life of faith is not easy and it is something that we can't do on our own. It requires a community of faith. It requires encounters with one another. And so, this Easter, we turn, seeking not proof, but truth, not facts, but encounters, we turn to one another and say "show us the way Lord", and when he does together we can say "My Lord and My God".

Amen