

Easter 2 B  
St. John 20:19-31  
April 8th, 2018  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

**"Blessed are those who believe and have not seen."**

Doubt

We live in a time of doubting, and our doubts get the better of us and grow by the day. Into all this doubt, God invites us to consider the opposite: that is, faith. If we can muster the faith, we can overcome our doubts and live the lives God intends us to live, live the lives we desire to live.

If you remember the local discount furniture pitchman, "Bob," saying in his ads, "If you can find a better deal than this, I doubt it..." Bob was onto something there. We doubt lots of things these days. Much of what we see on TV often leads us to doubt the claims made by advertisers, based on our experiences of being disappointed by these exaggerations.

First television and then the internet challenged our unbridled and sometimes misplaced faith. Today you have only to Google the assertions of anyone and you will discover whether their witness is true or false. If you doubt, find it out.

One of the most insidious forms of doubt is self-doubt. This is when we have no faith in ourselves or our own abilities, when we run ourselves down in terms of our desirability or worth, we become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is easy to say to someone else or ourselves, "don't doubt yourself." It takes a lot more internal work not to do that. And it also takes a little bit of faith to venture forth, despite the doubts and so called evidence to the contrary.

The most seemingly dangerous form of doubt is doubt about God.

It is not dangerous to doubt whether God exists. It is even healthy, because you can't have faith without doubt, otherwise there is no faith and everything is accepted as a scientific proven fact. But that is not how science or nature works, is it? Nor is it how God works. God wants us to trust and have faith beyond our ability to understand this here-to-for unknowable God. We know what we need to know. God is love. Trust God and have faith in what God is doing for you. The

real danger when it comes to God is getting stuck in our doubts and abandoning every vestige of faith we might have had in our hearts and in our bones.

One hundred and six years ago, the ocean liner Titanic sailed this week on Tuesday, April 10th. It struck an iceberg at 11:40 pm next Saturday night and sank under three hours later. I raise this piece of history because it is a morality story about faith in technology.

Faith is sometimes misplaced in someone or something in whom it should not be vested. Surely that is the case of the doomed ship Titanic, many of whose passengers and crew believed was unsinkable. Technology seemed to have triumphed over the risks of travel on the sea. However, doubt might have produced more caution in the design of the great boat and later, the course of the ship as it sailed through a field of ice, which might have saved the lives of over 1500 people, including many of those actually steering the ship. The Titanic remains one of the greatest and most enduring metaphors for misplaced trust and faith in the creations of man as over and against humility before God and the raw power of nature. The survivors of the wreck also learned to live with the knowledge their lives were made possible by the death of another passenger, a lesson appropriate for this Easter Season.

"Ye of little faith, why did you doubt?" In fact you can't have faith without doubt. Doubt is the maturing of faith, for we must confront our doubts and do battle with them, when we are ready to do so. Once we have confronted our doubts, faith, by the grace of God, has the opportunity to deepen, even in the midst of the darkness of doubt around us and sometimes within us. Doubt is not something God does not know about. The New Testament is full of stories which contain a kernel of doubt. Even in the Old Testament we see a major story about doubt when the Hebrews, after losing faith that God will get them to the promise land and has brought them this far only to wander in the desert, they suppose for nothing, so they fashion the Golden Calf in the Wilderness. God blesses us with the experiences, with the knowledge we need to make the leap of faith.

Remember the story of the disciples who are crossing the Sea of Galilee ahead of Jesus, and he comes to them 'walking on water?' Jesus invites Peter to come out to him on the water, and Peter does so, but when a wind comes up, Peter becomes fearful, he begins to doubt and starts to sink into the water. Then we have these words from Jesus himself: [Matthew 14:31] "Ye of little faith, why did you doubt?"

While God is frustrated with our doubt, God knows our limitations and the temptations of this world which cause us to doubt. We live in a world today full of doubters. It seems as though everyone you meet is no longer a believer, or a person who was once in the faith, but has left. No doubt the dissembling of the institutional church has caused a lot of this: what we sometimes read about the institution is so far removed from the Gospels and the example of Jesus that it makes faith seem incredulous. It is also a profound cultural shift from just 50 years ago. Back then the peer pressure was strong because most everyone was a Christian, at least in name, and that made it easier to say, 'I believe.' Now we need to be really careful with those words. We really have to mean them when we utter them. Faith is about the congregation of the living family of the people of God. Doubt grows out of buildings and institutions which man creates to enshrine them.

And we do not always have to see as eyewitnesses. Sometimes that experience of God is in spirit or felt in our hearts. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Yes, God can be incredulous about our unbelief and our doubts, but God still loves us and reaches out to us. Consider this story about the boy with seizures: "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.' And he answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, how long has this been happening to him? And he said, from childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him, but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you are able! -All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately, the father of the child cried out, 'I believe, help my unbelief.'" [Mark 9:16-24]

Thomas exclaims on seeing the risen Jesus in this morning's Gospel account: "My Lord and My God." These are words revealing faith overcoming doubt. And this is also a prayer which Christians have uttered for centuries during the invocation and institution narrative in the Eucharistic prayer, as the consecrated sacrament, now the body and blood of Christ, is elevated at the altar. A simple manual act reveals an opportunity for faith in the risen and present Jesus, fulfilling a promise that He would be with us, conquering our doubts, at least for a time.

Another prayer of devotion, which we use right before communion at St. George's, comes from the story of the centurion in Luke 7:6-10. "Lord I am not worthy you should come under my roof, but speak the word only and your servant will be healed." It recalls the faith of the centurion in Jesus, believing that Jesus can heal the slave whom the centurion loves. His faith is rewarded. He has no doubt that Jesus can and will help him. Our liturgy and tradition of worship is very scriptural and full of allusions to Biblical passages like this to help us remember the story of our faith and salvation. This prayer is often uttered by the faithful to this day in many churches, right before they receive communion, to remind them that faith is what counts. Let your faith overcome your doubts.

Let there be no doubt this morning. What we give to Addison and to Reagan is the greatest gift to receive: new life in Christ. It is vital that this new life be nurtured in the faith, that their own faith may grow strong and become fruitful in their lives. So as we proceed with the great mystery of Baptism this morning, let this be our prayer:

I believe, help my unbelief! [Mark 9:24] AMEN.