

Easter 2c  
St. John 20:19-31  
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St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Faith and Doubt

*"Unless I see the mark of nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

Some things you just have to take on faith. Thomas is not willing to accept the news that Jesus is risen from the dead on the mere say-so of his friends and companions. He wants to see for himself. You see, the first time Jesus presented himself to the disciples, Thomas was not present. When his friends make such an important assertion that a man has risen from the dead, Thomas rightly wants more than mere say-so. He wants to see for himself. He wants something more to go on, if he is going to commit to believing this himself. He simply won't take their word for it.

There are very few sure things in this life. Yet we keep trying to make sure bets. We want proof before we are willing to commit. That seems to make a lot of sense. If it's not a sure thing, can't be a sure thing, then you will just have to take a chance on it. Is it too good to believe it's true?

We just went through *April Fools Day* this past week. This is a time when people set up pranks or tell stories to "fool" the gullible. It is one of my favorite times of the year, and I pride myself on being quite the prankster! Yet I have become aware that there are fewer and fewer people who are willing to accept my say so for the April Fool scenarios I present. I thought up

this scheme to tell one fellow employee that our supervisor was not coming back from vacation next week, and that I had been selected as the new supervisor. I said it with the best poker face I had, yet as soon as the first few words of my prank left my lips, she said, "April-Fools" and my gig was ended. People are not so willing to believe what they hear in the coffee room.

This is also the middle of the 2016 political season and there are plenty of doubts floating around there on all sides. Candidates are want to make promises to get elected, and some of them begin to sound pretty tall. We have grown to be skeptical about campaign promises based on our past experience: few of these hopeful and desirable promises ever seem to get fulfilled. It feels as though candidates are just saying what we want to hear to get elected. We distrust their motives because politicians in general sit atop a mountain of promises made and forgotten after they get into office.

The fact is, the system itself will not allow these pie-in-the-sky promises to be fulfilled, even if a new and politically naive politician actually makes an effort to keep their promises. This, of course makes the electorate all the more cynical when it comes to trusting politicians in general, which is a shame, because there are many caring people who try to serve the community in this way. Imagine their own disappointment when their hopes, desires and dreams are dashed when they hit the wall of "*it's not possible*" after taking office.

So how is our trust and belief to be restored? It must be *earned* back! The only way you can regain someone's trust is by empirical evidence, based on his or her experience of interactions with you. If you have broken a relationship by being distrustful, it is not enough to say you're sorry and that this won't happen again. Those

are nice words to hear, but the only way for them to have any meaning to the victim of your untrustworthiness is to for you to be trustworthy from now on, without exception, in *all* your interactions! Until then, an element of doubt will always lurk in the shadows.

Whenever you are about to make an important decision, it is helpful to do your homework and research. Should I buy this house or this condo? Is this car a good one and have I made a good deal? There are lots of ways to go about this, but one of the best places to begin is with Google. Google it. Google will only take you so far. Next you want to read a sampling of the reviews, both good and bad, and try to discover the truth: is this something I can believe in? Are the claims about it credible?

It's one thing to see something on TV or the Internet. It is quite another thing to actually see the thing in person, to be able to physically inspect it, take it for a test drive if it is a car, or touch it, smell it, taste it if it is food or a libation.

Doubt seems to be fairly pervasive these days. Perhaps it is because our trust has been violated so many times that it has become part of our nature to become cynical and doubtful about most things we hear. The phrase, "*As Seen on TV*" used to mean something to consumers, but now the words are viewed with a heavy dose of doubt and some derision on top of that. This comes from years of television advertising that again promised the sky and made their products look easy and reliable to use, only for consumers to discover that the opposite was true after they acquired these things. Remember the infamous "Veg-o-matic"? You needed a strong man who worked out every day to have the strength to make the thing work. Auto-makers went tested our trust in the late 1960's and 1970's with the concept of planned

obsolescence and turning out cars that were poorly made and sold on the cheap, so that manufacturers could make up the profits on service and parts. This literally back-fired on the American auto industry when people started to buy foreign cars which had previously been viewed as risky investments. Pretty soon, due to the untrustworthiness of American car manufacturers, there were more Datsuns and VW "Bugs" on the road than their products, and to great extent, once this door to imports was opened, it has never been closed since.

And all this came because of doubts, doubts about the products based on consumer experience, and a growing doubt and lack of confidence in advertising, which has not abated, but continues to grow with the experience each evening of television commercials. For all the money spent on Madison Avenue, we press the mute or fast forward buttons on our remotes in order to avoid the commercials altogether, not paying much attention, if any, to them. And there is now the advent of advertising-free programing on downloadable TV. Of course, this has given birth to "product-placement" right within our programs and movies.

The proliferation of messages that we doubt and distrust proliferates our modern experience. Turn on your computer and ads pop up. Open your email, and the thing is full of advertising, both around the margins of your computer screen, or even in the emails you receive. Advertising accounts for far more of the emails we get, then the personal mail we actually wish to receive and read. And then they even call our telephones, landlines and cell phones, usually at our dinnertime, with robo-calls demanding our attention about their supposedly important announcements.

Could this be why it is so difficult to advertise the Gospel message or invite new members to church? The message of the

Gospel gets mixed in with all the rest of this stew! Not to mention those televangelists who prey especially upon the elderly, seeking the balance of the proceeds from their monthly Social Security checks, by soliciting donations for theme parks, jet airplanes and air conditioned dog houses in the name of God and constructing monuments like the former "Crystal Cathedral" which become gross and contrarian symbols that Christianity is just one more game like all the others.

But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

And that is sad, because we have a very important message to tell others and share with them. Their lives depend upon it, not their pocketbooks or the church's coffers. It is a message which can truly improve their lives and harmonize them with the rest of creation that God has made. Lives are changed and transformed for the better when they come in contact with it.

How do we show the mark of the nails and the wound in His side? We do that by being authentic to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! We must earn the trust of others like everyone else, and not assume that others will have faith merely because we put the name of God on it. Real faith comes through the experience of God in the world. How well do you reflect God in your life? Does your face mirror Christ, or merely the self-interest that others see so often in our time?

Thomas has become the patron saint for our epoch. We can relate to his skepticism. But we must also remember his faith:

*"Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then*

he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Thomas came to faith after he did his homework and saw Jesus for himself. The key is to being open to do your homework, to want to learn more. We cannot duck this experience or the work that is attended to it. People see God in things like Mobile Foodshare, in the touch of caring hands. People see God in genuine generosity that expects nothing in return. "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works, and give glory to God in heaven."

Taste and see, the old hymn says. Our homework is to seek God in all things and at all times. God will make God-self known to you. I feel it is better to be someone who has faith in others rather than to view others cynically. I tend to trust other people unless they violate that trust. Perhaps with that approach, we will be blessed with catching a glimpse of God, and be blessed as those who have not seen and yet believe.

And our eyes will be opened, and like Thomas, we will exclaim, "My Lord and My God." AMEN