



Pastor Gwen's Sermon
 2nd Sunday of Easter
 "Perfect Faith"
 Sunday, April 7, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Christ is Risen. . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Most pastor's I know take this Sunday off. Must be because we need a rest after a hectic Holy Week. Or maybe it is really because after such a rousing Easter Sunday celebration, we just do not want to come down from that high and talk about Doubting Thomas. In our three-year lectionary cycle it appears every year. Yet, there is something interesting about doubt that intrigues me. However, the thought of "doubt" does create a negative connotation. I believe that it is good to admit that we as human beings have doubts. I also think that doubt can lead to extremely positive revelations. So, let's take a look at our story this morning, Doubting Thomas.

Our Doubting Thomas story comes at the end of the Gospel of John. Just like on Easter Sunday we had the ending to Mark's Gospel, today it is the ending of John. There is another chapter, chapter 21 that was believed to be an epilogue to John's narrative, and it is believed that it was written later but even possibly by John. Even as the last chapter 20, does not leave us hanging as did our Mark text from Easter. It concludes with a short remark of the purpose of this Gospel book where Jesus does other signs that were not written down. But just prior to that we have the section on Jesus and Thomas, that gives this disciple his century's old name Doubting Thomas.

Jesus' interaction with Thomas was important enough to be the last story in John's writing. If you are a doubting Thomas and are here this morning, you are in the right place. I doubt that any of us can say truthfully that we have never doubted anything in our lives, especially doubting that Christ is the Messiah and was raised from the dead to overcome death and the grave.

Wednesday this week as I was studying for this message, I read my [Daily Guidepost](#) and there was a devotion from the Edward Grinnan. He was the past managing editor of their annual devotional book. He talked about his life as an alcoholic and how he had been sober since April 3, 1996, and that it was only through the grace of God that he learned from AA that got him sober. His journey was and still is a rough one, day by day leaning on a power greater than himself or his addiction. He called it a journey that God led him on with the "only power that could save me, a day at a time, by the miracle of sobriety."

I have not talked about this much, but my mother was an alcoholic. After I got out of college, I went back to live at home with her after my father divorced her. Since I worked nights in the bowling alley, I would be home to watch her stare at the clock until it struck noon, so she could take her first drink of the day. She was convinced that she did not have a drinking problem since she could wait until it was noon. That logic escaped me, and I did my best to get her some help. I took her to a therapist from Lutheran Social Services. Between my dad leaving, her drinking and breast cancer, it was just too much for her to handle. The counselor seems to help for a while, but then excessive drinking continued.

I wish that I had known about AA at that point in my life and the 12-step program that has helped so many. Having not gone through the program, I understand the belief behind AA is that there is a "higher power" in the universe. Through this "higher power" it is possible to solve the person's drinking problem. Alcoholism is a disease that cannot be solved alone, by oneself. There is a definite need for the intervention of the "higher power" and a support community. So, from the beginning the AA Big Book says that one needs to find a faith that works. Faith in the "higher power", God and faith that if they follow the 12-steps they will have a better chance at staying clean and having a better life without alcohol. If you would like to read the AA Big Book someday. I do have a copy in my office. I got it from one of the groups that meets here years ago when I attended their banquet. Very interesting how the book refers to God as Power, Creative Intelligence, Spirit of the Universe, All Powerful, Guide, Great Reality and of course the most used name is Higher Power. One statement that really resounds for me from the book is "Life without faith would not be life". And we all know that there is no life without God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit. Abundant life here on earth is not possible. We need our faith hurdles and questions as that is how the Holy Spirit directs us to God. And we all want to grow into the people we want to be, or as Christians would say, the people God wants us to be.

And so why do I tell you all of this? Does it not sound similar to our good friend Doubting Thomas. He questions that Jesus is the Messiah, the highest power, the one that was raised from the dead. Thomas needs to see it to believe it for his faith to be secure. For us today, that is not possible. And as I have learned over time, people come to faith in different ways, with differing intensities at different times. Our Easter story shows us that. The beloved disciple comes to faith just by seeing the tomb empty. Mary believed when the Lord calls her name. The disciples see the risen Lord. Thomas even goes a bit further and says that he must touch Jesus' wounds. We have three of our senses covered; seeing, hearing, and touching. Why should we be surprised that Thomas wants to touch and see, that Jesus is alive. Wasn't that a famous commercial line in the 1960's, reach out and touch someone?

Taking a leap of faith is portrayed in many movies we have all seen. Remember the famous leap by Indiana Jones from a dark cave where it looks to him like the road, he has been running on to escape the guys with shooting guns and throwing spears, ends. A high cliff is what he sees as he looks down a thousand feet to the bottom. Dying seems evident by either spears or a sudden stop at the bottom of the cliff. He does not have time to think and so he chooses to trust the wise man's advice at the beginning of the movie. "Let go". And Indy jumps trusting that the hand of God will catch him and hold him and carry him gently to the other side. He lets go of what he can see, feel, and touch. And trusts a God whom he cannot see at all, a God that he is not sure even exists. Well, if you remember what happened, it was not as dramatic as that because there was no cliff, it just appeared like that to the naked eye.

And that is often how life is not just to an alcoholic but to us as well. We cannot see into the future and sometimes we even get what is right in front of us confused. That is what faith is all about. Faith isn't knowing for sure that something will happen. Faith is really just the opposite! Faith is not knowing that something will happen. It is not being sure at all but rather going ahead and taking that next step anyway. And remember faith is not the exact opposite of doubt.

Doubt is a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction where you question the truth or fact of something. Faith on the other hand is complete trust or confidence in someone or something. Faith is a strong belief in God.

Our disciples locked away in the upper room after Jesus' death had faith, shaky as it seemed. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, sent from God, but what they did not know is where he was. They let their fear overtake them, fear for their own lives because of what they believed, what they had faith in. And then Jesus appears to reassure them and give them all a sense of peace. He came to strengthen their faith, to make it unwavering. Jesus gave them their courage back to go out and share the good news. That is all except for Thomas. He was not present and wanted to see and touch Jesus for himself.

Thomas was not willing to allow the proclamation of Jesus' being alive given by the other disciple to replace the fear in his heart. Only seeing and touching Jesus could do that for Thomas. And so, he returned to the upper room the next week with the other 10 disciples to be given the same opportunity, to see Jesus and be reassured with the peace of God through Jesus. He came back to the group. We have no idea where Thomas was the week before, but he was absent. And now reunited with the other band of disciples, he is strengthened by seeing Jesus alive, scars and all.

And I suspect that is why you are here today. To be where you can have your faith strengthened, where you can feel God's presence and peace. The security of a like minded group can overcome the feelings of being lost, alone, and afraid. But our gatherings are not to dispel the fact that we have doubts, but rather to hear that there is nothing wrong with our faith! Your doubts are not unique, trust me. I hear about them all the time, and I share in doubting with you. But together we can overcome those fears, those doubts. We share our experiences and feelings only to find out that we are not the "lone ranger". But just because we doubt, that does not mean that we have no or little faith.

Faith is a gift of God, and it is not weak. It is perfect. It is rather us that is not perfect. We are all sinners and therefore doubt does creep into our souls. Questions arise: is there really a God, and if he does exist, why does he actually care about little ol' me. How can this guy Jesus forgive my sins and give the promise of eternal life in heaven. Does this carpenter's son called the Son of God really have that kind of power? And the only way to know that for sure is to jump off that cliff not knowing but trusting a God who promises such gracious gifts. And always remember that Jesus did not admonish Thomas for doubting or questioning. Rather he was gracious enough to offer physical proof to Thomas. And he does the same for us. When our faith seems weak, we need to stop thinking, questioning, and doubting and especially beating ourselves up for not having a stronger faith. We need to act and take the invite of Jesus to go out and help someone renew their faith or let someone whose faith is on stable ground, mentor to us.

Folks we need to do both things. We need to go out and share our faith and to listen to other's faith stories. Through both actions we will come to see a whole new world laying just ahead of us, remembering that Jesus will always walk with us in good times and in bad ones. Faith even the size

of a mustard seed is enough when planted and watered by the love of God through Jesus found in service to others and our loving neighbors.

Last week was Easter Sunday but every Sunday, even doubting Thomas Sunday, is a mini-Easter, in and of itself. We come together to worship such an amazing God who loves us so much and to receive through the Holy Spirit the gifts of grace, love and peace. So, make your plan to join together every Sunday with other believers to keep your faith strong and vibrant, in the one and only "Higher Power"; God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Christ has risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!