

2nd Sunday of Easter – 23 April 2017
John 20:19-31

Last Sunday we gathered and celebrated our Easter Day Eucharist: that Feast when we really take time to acknowledge that Jesus Christ did the unthinkable, the unbelievable, and rose from the dead and brought with him the truth and reality that we will share with him in eternal life. This is amazing, even so amazing as to be something that we struggle to understand.

Today we have heard that story we hear every year the Sunday after Easter: the story of “doubting” Thomas. And so, we move from one end of the spectrum of “*this is so incredible*” to the other end of the spectrum of “*yeah, I don’t know if I really buy into all this stuff ...*” If you are one of those folks who have no trouble comprehending the miraculous and splendiferous nature of the gift of Easter, then you can have a nap for the next few minutes. However, if you are one of those who might be scratching your head and saying to yourself “this all sounds a little ‘out there’ and too good to be true”, or if you fall somewhere in the middle, then this sermon is for you.

Last Sunday we heard the story of Mary Magdalene who believed in the unbelievable as soon as she heard Jesus say her name. Mary was able to dive right in to her new life in Christ and she didn’t struggle with what this meant or even how it could be true. She was faithful to Jesus in life. She was faithful to Jesus in his death. And she became immediately faithful to Jesus Christ in his new, resurrected and eternal life.

Maybe you know some people who are like that. Maybe you are one of them. There are a few blessed people in the world who seem to simply just get it. They are able to believe and pattern their lives in ways that show the world that they believe in Jesus Christ and are prepared to follow him wherever he may lead, simply because he has asked.

Over the centuries though, we have come to realize that there are more people whose faith lives resonate with Thomas or the other disciples than with Mary. And that is okay. It is *really* okay.

There are some Christian denominations, or types of Churches, that present the idea that to be a faithful and true Christian, you will never question, never doubt. They sometimes go so far as to make members of their churches feel unworthy or un-Christian if they express doubts or concerns about who Jesus is in general or about who Jesus is in their own personal faith lives.

If you fall into that category of people who “question and wonder”, then the Anglican Church is probably right where you should be. We are a denomination that was established on the basis that we are not expected (nor are we wanted) to be spoon-fed what we believe. We are called to use the intellect God gave us and to also utilize the senses we have been given so that we might both come to *know* Jesus and come to *experience* him in a very real and personal way. But as unique and individual as we are, so too is the relationship and experience and understanding and interaction we will have with him as we receive him as our Risen Lord and Saviour.

Within the Anglican Church we often use the phrase “three-legged stool” to discuss how we operate as a believing and faithful community. The three legs of that stool are Scripture,

Tradition and Reason. All three are necessary to hold the balance and weight of who we are, how we worship and how we interact, and understand our interactions, with God through Christ.

Scripture is, of course, the Bible. As Christians, and as Anglicans, we believe that all things necessary for salvation can be found in scripture. However, we also make the distinction that not all things in scripture are necessary for salvation. (That may seem like a small distinction but it is very important nonetheless, and something that we can get into another day!) Tradition is not that which, as some may wish it to be, that old belief that once you do it twice in the Anglican Church it becomes a 'tradition'. Tradition is the work of the Church throughout the ages, and how we have come to believe what we believe and do what we do. The "Church" referenced here is not simply the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island, or even the Church in Canada. The "Church" is the church universal since the beginning of Christianity. The traditions that we balance on with our three-legged stool are the established patterns and traditions, beliefs, liturgies, doctrines and dogmas that have been evolving for the past 18 or 19 centuries. The Reason of which we speak is just that – reason. The thinking of the people who gather to worship and have done so since the Church began. Our intellect is a formidable part of how we come to understand, experience and establish a relationship with God through Christ. But that Reason is not just an individual sense of what is reasonable. While it does contain that, it encompasses the reasonable practices and intellectual understandings of all those who have gone before us: worshipping, praying, studying, discerning: so that what we have inherited through Scripture, Tradition and Reason is something that is faithful to the Gospel and also faithful to who God created us to be as intelligent, thinking, reasoning, emotional, feeling, experiencing people.

So, you may ask, how does all this fit in with "doubting" Thomas and the Gospel of this morning? I think that this Gospel really is the launch pad for the way we have inherited the Church through Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

Thomas was an individual. While the others were sequestered away in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews, Thomas was out in the world, doing something of his own. He had the guts and the wherewithal to wonder and question those things that the other disciples had already witnessed for themselves but which he wanted to test with his own proofs. Thomas was hesitant to simply believe without questioning and he was willing to take it on the chin when the time came.

Would it have been better if he had simply believed? Of course. I say "of course" not because I think that Jesus was so much disappointed in Thomas' unbelief, but more because every moment spent in unbelief is a moment *not spent* in the wonder and glory of believing and living in relationship with Christ. Why would we want to waste even one precious moment?

In my version of the Bible, there are subheadings sprinkled throughout the text, and just at the end of the Gospel passage, before verse 30, the NRSV puts in the subheading "The Purpose of the Book" (meaning the purpose of the Gospel of John in the Bible). The author of John's Gospel, then goes on to say this "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Right from the beginning, in the immediate throes of the Resurrection, Jesus, and his followers, knew that believing for the many would be difficult if it did not have a base in their holy writing (Scripture), in the traditions of the faith as handed down to them and if it seemed unreasonable. Jesus knew what we would need, and so he provided proof. The Gospel writer too knew that we would need some help, and it was provided.

There is no shame in being a “doubting” Thomas. The shame lies in the time we waste when we refuse to even engage with the Scripture, Tradition and Reason that the Church has provided so that we too might enter into this miraculous and wonderful experience and relationship that is “being a Christian”.

Don’t wait too long to jump in and play with this three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition and Reason. The shame is not that you will lose your chance to experience Christ. The shame is that you might waste precious time waiting. Don’t wait. Jump right in and see what happens... It is worth it. I promise!