

Year C – 2nd Sunday of Easter – 08 April 2018
John 20:19-31

This gospel lesson about Thomas' doubt and his belief only after he had tangible proof is one that seems to be anticlimactic after the glorious celebration of resurrection last Sunday. After hearing the gospel, singing and saying the alleluias for the first time in many weeks, how could the church so quickly seemingly slip backwards into a more negative and doubting place? We are an Easter people, celebrating Jesus' conquering of death and the incredible gift of new life that we have all been given. How can we doubt when we have heard the good news? How can we possibly understand or relate to Thomas when we are the Christian church in the 21st century?

Actually, it is quite easy to understand Thomas – even when we are still within the octave of Easter Day itself.

When we look at our world and all that is going on within it, do we see the risen Jesus Christ yet or is it easier to focus on the work that people still need to do in order that they too, like "faithful and undoubting" disciples, will be able to see Jesus standing before them?

I know from personal experience that it is quite easy to pay lip service to my faith and profess that I believe and can see Christ with an unwavering faith. I also know from personal experience that from time to time, or to be honest, a lot of times, that is just hogwash. Having faith, knowing that Christ is present before me, beside me, with me everywhere I go, can be difficult. Sometimes it seems almost impossible. And the truth is, that making that statement doesn't mean that I am an unfaithful Christian or an unworthy priest. It means that I am being honest about my faith, just like Thomas. And yes, it would be better if Jesus would never have to say to me, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." But at the same time, when Jesus has had to say that to me, he has never followed it up with "and now you will be unblessed because your faith has wavered."

Quite to the contrary, in those times of doubt, in those times of questioning, Jesus has, time and time again, shown me his hands and his feet, reminding me that what I know in my heart and what I believe in my soul is indeed in harmony with what I, from time to time, demand that he show me through tangible evidence.

Is it the ideal way to show my Christian faith? Probably not, but then again which of the disciples were ideal in *their* faith if we were to take a close enough look at them? Is it faithful to keep asking for reasons to believe in the midst of struggling to believe? Absolutely. The unfaithful response to our own disbelief would be to simply walk away from Christ without asking for help in believing. When we come to the Lord, like Thomas, asking questions and wanting proof, we are still coming to the Lord, asking questions showing him our desire to know him better, to increase our faith, even when our faith is at its lowest. Always the faithful path is to look at Christ and ask for help, even if that help is proof so that we may have a stronger faith, sometimes so that we may simply have a faith.

Our own community here and the world at large have been called, like never before, to exercise our Easter faith. In the face of the apparent declining belief in Christianity around the world, the ongoing tensions in the middle-east, the concerns about our environment and our governments, we are called to look at the world and all that is happening in it and say not that we have faith in spite of what is happening, but that through Christ we have faith because of everything that is happening.

The world around us offers us many questions and opportunities to become the doubting Thomas. More and more as the years march on, being a living witness to Christ becomes less expected by society and hence, more questionable. There can be a great deal of pressure put on us to “prove” our faith and to prove *why* we have faith, and that very real pressure can lead us back to Christ demanding answers and signs of proof so that we can carry those answers back to the nay-sayers and to ourselves in our moments or times of personal doubt and disbelief.

The world we live in also encourages us to look for quick fixes to disbelief and fast answers for doubt or confusion. We are quickly discovering, especially within ‘church-land’ that there is always an answer, a sure-fire way to lead the church away from questioning to certainty, to move from ‘struggling’ to ‘thriving’ church. The lure of ‘mega-churches’ and Christian self-help, church-help books has become a phenomenon almost as big as Christ himself. We have even developed human criteria for what constitutes a ‘successful’ church. And in our desire to become a ‘successful’ church we run the risk of neglecting to ask the question of God: What is the *divine* criteria for a ‘successful’ church?

But we must also ask the question: Are we coming to Church, are we coming to Christ, with our honest doubts and a desire to see the truly risen Lord like Thomas, or are we merely trying to maintain a faith that we have always known, which doesn’t scare us, that we can share with others safely?

We have two choices before us. We can choose to be like the other disciples or we can choose to be like Thomas.

The disciples were the Church of the fearful, worried about what would happen next now that things had changed, now that the world around them was becoming somewhat hostile to them and their beliefs. “The disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews,” and Jesus had to come to them to bring them peace.

Many of the churches of today are so scared of the world out there, so scared of the idea of being challenged, that they wait in their own space, even in their own worship, for Christ to arrive and bring them peace. They don’t ask questions. They expect to be told what all the ‘right’ answers are. They don’t voice the doubts they have. They simply wait for Christ to come to them.

On the other hand, there is Thomas. Thomas did not wait behind closed doors. He may have been afraid of those who would persecute and challenge him, but he went out into the world anyway. And by going on with his life, while obviously developing his own questions and demands of proof, Thomas did not wait for Christ to come to him. He waited for Christ while living his life, and what he found was new and greater life. He was *willing to find* new and greater life. Thomas allowed himself the natural doubts and

questions he had but he was honest about them, allowed them to be voiced, and, more importantly, allowed Christ to answer his questions completely. And in response, Thomas' life changed completely.

Unlike many of the churches of today who are scared of asking the honest questions and scared of allowing or encouraging the parishioners to ask the honest questions, the Thomas churches in the world are the churches who are not scared to go looking for the risen Christ, demanding signs and proof. They may not be the churches that have hundreds of people in the pews or websites and pastors with all the answers, but they are the churches that actively reach out their fingers and touch Jesus' hands as they feed the homeless. They are the churches that reach out their hands and put them into Jesus' side as they advocate for human rights, hammer nails into Habitat for Humanity homes, comfort the sick as volunteers in hospital and touch the untouchables of society.

Those are the churches and the Christians who have the courage to ask Christ if they can believe and who allow themselves to be forever changed when they, like Thomas, recognize that their belief is founded, secure and real.

As Church and as Christians we have two options to choose from: we can be the fearful disciples, or we can be the Thomas' filled with questions and even doubts but willing to believe the proof, and then willing to act *as* the proof.

We have just finished a period of prayer and fasting for forty days called Lent. We have entered a glorious period of 50 days called Easter. This 50 days is a time when we are called, once again, to pray and celebrate the gifts God has given us as church – as Christians. Throughout this season of Easter, we are given the opportunity to go out into the world looking for Christ, and when we have found him, to share our finding with others.

As we celebrate in this Easter season, let's allow ourselves to have the courage of Thomas to ask the big questions and wander out there in the world, away from the closed and locked doors. God has big answers for our big questions. Let's begin to prepare ourselves for the answers we will most definitely receive.