

## Gospel - John 20: 19-31

Second Sunday of Easter

Sermon 4.19.20

### Patti Case

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Poor Thomas. Like so many of us, he just wanted to see it to believe it. As a confirmed cynic, I get Thomas. Thomas doubted.

Sound familiar? In the last few weeks, as your life has been disrupted, you're unable to see your grandchildren or get your hair cut, the simplest of errands is impossible to complete....Have you doubted? I have.

Thomas had something we don't have.

When Thomas doubted, Jesus appeared to him and asked him to satisfy his questions. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side."

Thomas was able to satisfy his doubts. My Lord and my God!

What about us? When Thomas acknowledged that Jesus was before him, risen from the dead, 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." Jesus is talking to you. And you. And you. And me.

Our lessons today cover a good bit of ground about the question of faith. In the Acts of the Apostles, the first lesson (which you may note is from the New Testament rather than the old during this Easter Season), we are reminded of David's prophesy:

"I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken...."

Our psalm sings out:

"O LORD, you are my portion and my cup; \*  
it is you who uphold my lot."

And our Epistle, written by Peter, buoys the Christians scattered around Asia Minor:

"Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Last, but not least, our gospel: To me, it seems like a classic crisis communications outline. First, reassure your audience. "Peace be with you," says Jesus to his disciples who are scared and alone now that their leader is dead. Second, focus on the facts – remind them of what they know. Jesus showed the disciples his wounds, reminding them that he was the same teacher they had known. He reassured them again, saying "Peace be with you." And then he reminded them to stay the course. "As my Father has sent me, so I send you."

We all doubt.

Merriam Webster uses terms like “strong conviction” and “firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”

Maybe we should infer from those terms that there is no such thing as “a little faith.” Because if we have strong conviction and firm belief, we have faith, and if we have a little bit of conviction and we believe most of the time, that’s...something else.

Yet Thomas was faithful. And he doubted. We need no more proof of our humanity than that – our doubts. Or, as Augustine put it: “A man doubts, therefore God is.”

Doubt is not the antithesis of faith. It is, instead, the tie that binds our faith. I often say that one of the things I love about the Episcopal denomination is that we are a church of inquiry. My best conversations with all of you are not an exploration of “here is what this means” but “what does this mean?” That’s why we study the Bible rather than simply reading it.

If we already knew all the answers, we wouldn’t need faith. We, too, would be all-knowing. There are moments when I wish for that, but for the most part, I think it would be an enormous burden. So faith it is. And the questions we have? The doubts?

In my business life, some of the best managers I know hardly ever provide answers. I remember one manager sitting in a meeting and complaining, “I wish the owners would tell us what they want,” he said. The vice president facilitating the meeting got right up in his face and said, “What do YOU want?” He was illustrating to that manager, and to all of us, that the owners of our company aren’t foresters. They hire the experts.

The best managers pose questions which in turn create rich dialogue. Of course, sooner or later in business we have to come up with answers and move on, but I have seen time and again that the dialogue is richer because we pose the questions and don’t feel we have to know all the answers.

We will never know all the answers. That’s what faith is about.

One theologian likened faith to riding a bicycle without training wheels. We can’t see the wounds in his hands and feet, nor can we put our hand in his side. Yet, like Thomas, we are expected to believe. Where do we go for confirmation?

We have something that Thomas didn’t have. We have over 2000 years of Christians before us. And if that’s not enough, well, the faces of those receiving meals at Community Lifeline are a start. Your notes and phone calls thanking us for livestreaming services – that’s another one. The companies that have stepped up to manufacture face masks and other protective equipment. A new organization that our own Drew MacEwen is trying to bring to Mason County, pairing laid off restaurant workers and the empty kitchens they normally populate with folks who need meals. The new shoots popping up every day in the garden, even the weeds. The bright greens in the forest this time of year. Zoom meetings, cell phone apps. Door to door delivery.

My dad called himself a confirmed agnostic. I would argue that, particularly in later life, he was an agnostic athiest. Many times, I asked him to explain his position. He told me that his parents were Seventh Day Adventists and when he couldn’t buy into that set of beliefs anymore, his parents told him to go search out a denomination he could believe in. So he went to every church he could find, including the Holy Rollers. And he told me he never could find something he could believe in.

It's a shame he quit looking.

Our doubts can serve to stir us up. Like mosquito bites, they irritate us until we scratch the itch, in the case of faith, seeking answers. And now is a great time to seek those answers you've always wondered about. Like who Peter was writing to in our Epistle today. Or what the difference is between an agnostic and an atheist. You've got the time, you know you do. Maybe we can start an online Bible study. A list of queries, as the Quaker denomination uses.

Or, we can let those doubts bog us down, until our only belief is the doubt itself.

I ran across a beautiful hymn, from the Gather Comprehensive hymnal. The text, written by Brian Wren, sums it all up:

Christ is alive, and goes before us to show, and share, what love can do. This is a day of new beginnings. Our God is making all things new! Our God is making all things new.

Amen.