

Series: Life!

Sermon: Doubtters Welcome

Mark 16:1-7

The day after the Sabbath day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought some sweet-smelling spices to put on Jesus' body. 2 Very early on that day, the first day of the week, soon after sunrise, the women were on their way to the tomb. 3 They said to each other, "Who will roll away for us the stone that covers the entrance of the tomb?"

4 Then the women looked and saw that the stone had already been rolled away, even though it was very large. 5 The women entered the tomb and saw a young man wearing a white robe and sitting on the right side, and they were afraid.

6 But the man said, "Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth, who has been crucified. He has risen from the dead; he is not here. Look, here is the place they laid him. 7 Now go and tell his followers and Peter, 'Jesus is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there as he told you before.'"

John 20:24-29

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Sermon

As we look at the Disciples, we discover that they all had a distinct personality different from each other. Whether or not that was the case, it seems to be a fact the writers of the Bible highlighted a particular point of character in each person. Peter was strong headed, Judas was the traitor, John had love, Andrew ushered people in, Mary was a faithful companion equal in her own right, - each disciple and follower had a niche. It's not that they were only those things, but that was the element that was highlighted. Many years ago, my dad called me up. After a short conversation, I asked why he called. He said that he had talked to all of my other siblings that day and he wanted to finish off by talking to the sane one. My ego got a small boost for just a second, and then he said, "Yeah, I talked to your sister the responsible one, your little brother the brave one, and your other brother the fun one." And I was the sane one? I wanted to be the responsible one, the brave one, are you saying that I'm not fun? He was just giving characterization to one part of our personality. I just happen to have the

most boring one. We have that in the Gospels. We remember the disciples for one or two events or personality traits.

The person I would like to look at this morning is the disciple Thomas. Thomas is forever known as the doubter for his role in the Easter Story. We don't know much about Thomas, how he got to be a disciple, where he met Jesus. Many of the disciples were fisherman, but Thomas was never included with that bunch. The narrative never gives any indication as to where Thomas came from - he's just listed as one of the Twelve. We don't know how or why he came to Jesus, but he was there. He was also called Didymus, which is Greek for twin. Thomas means twin in Hebrew. A twin to whom we are not sure. It was during the Easter episode that Thomas gets the most press.

It was on Sunday, after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene and the ladies went to the tomb where they had laid Jesus just a couple of days before. They met the angel who told them that Jesus is alive and will meet them again soon. The ladies were the first evangelists. We are told, that night, the Disciples were all together, except for Thomas. And Jesus appeared to them. "Peace be with you!", Jesus said. He showed them his hands and his side, the wounds of the crucifixion. The disciples were overjoyed that they saw the Lord. For that whole next week, the disciples tried to tell Thomas what had happened. And Thomas wouldn't budge. I don't know if I would! Matter of fact, Mary didn't believe until an angel told her so. In another gospel, Peter didn't believe Mary - he had to run and check - and then he still didn't know what to think. The other disciples were just as puzzled until Jesus came and stood among them. They had the advantage. Thomas still had no proof for himself - proof that the others had received. The others had doubted just the same, but Thomas is our scapegoat for the doubt of the disciples. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." Actually, the more I thought about it, that is kind of a morbid request. Can't you just look at his face and make a judgement as to whether or not it is Jesus? Why play around with his wounds? But we all have our own requirements before we believe something. The other day, my wife Stephanie smelled the milk in our fridge. "Oh, that smells horrible!". So what do I do? I say, "Here, let me smell." Why couldn't I just take her word for it? Growing up, I discovered what an electric fence did by watching my brother grab it. Of course, watching his reaction, I had to try it as well. Why couldn't I just believe? Thomas was just like that. Unless he had proof, he wouldn't believe that Jesus had come back. A week after Easter, the disciples were together again, and Jesus reappeared. "Peace be with you." He went to Thomas and told him, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." From that point on, Thomas was a believer.

We have this image of Thomas as the pessimistic skeptic who dragged his feet and refused to see the truth. But his record in other areas of the Gospels tells us of a different Thomas. There is the story of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus. Jesus and the disciples were in another part of the country, having flown the area where Lazarus lived because of the hostilities they faced. They were going to be stoned to death, and they left. Then they heard that Lazarus was dying. After several days, Jesus said that they were going back to the country they just fled. All of the disciples were against this, but Thomas exhorted, "Let us also go, that we may die like him." Here is a man of unwavering faith and courage! Also, at the last supper, with his impending death, Jesus mentioned that "they will know the way to the place where I am going." And Thomas is the one to ask, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" The more I read of Thomas, the more I understood that he was the one that verbalized what everyone else was thinking! Jesus said, let's go back to Jerusalem. Thomas said what everyone else was thinking - "We're walking to our deaths." Jesus says "You know where I am going." No they didn't, and Thomas was the one to bring it up! And now, at the resurrection, no one believed until they saw, until they had proof, and that included Thomas, who stated the fact bluntly. I won't believe, until I have proof.

I can see a lot of Thomas in myself, the doubt, the uncertainty, the wanting of proof. Show me what I need to believe. During my few years in the ministry, I have learned two things about faith. First, Faith without doubt

is not faith. Faith without doubt is not faith. It isn't. Faith without doubt is called fact. A fact is something verifiable and concrete. There is evidence of its truthness. You are not going to change a fact. But faith, faith is believing in something despite the doubt. If you have faith in something, then you see through the questions and still believe. And what I've come to appreciate is that we all have doubts. We all have fears. We all face that uncertainty of "I'm not really sure this is right." I believe that it is alright to doubt. It's alright to question. It's alright to ask. If we are not allowed to question our faith every now and then, then what kind of faith do we have? If we are not allowed to ask the hard questions that our hearts are asking, then what room does faith have in our lives? Of the wedding couples who come into my office, I worry more for the couples who have no doubts as to their decision than the ones who have questions. Those without doubts seem to have their rose colored glasses on and have little appreciation as to the hard work and sacrifice a marriage brings. Those with questions seem to have a more realistic perception about the bonds of matrimony - knowing that their road will be filled with both happiness and sometimes struggle. Of the parents I speak with, I worry more about the parents who say that they are the perfect parents than the ones who doubt their worthiness to raise a child. It takes faith to raise a child! And faith requires doubt. If we think we don't make mistakes, then we are making a big mistake. Thomas doubted. Even though he doubted, he was still a disciple, he was still in the group. It is alright to doubt our faith every now and then. Sometimes questions need to be asked.

That leads me to the second thing I've learned about faith. God responds to our doubts. In the midst of our lives, God answers. For Thomas, he found the proof one week later than everyone else. All week long, the disciples pleaded with him, shared with him. It must have been one long confusing week. And then on the next Sunday night, Jesus appeared and all of Thomas' doubts were erased. After a week of uncertainty, after a week of mourning, his world had shattered around him, and now, a week later, Thomas found the answers that he was looking for. For Thomas, Easter took place that night. Not when everyone else experienced Easter the previous week, but when his own doubts were cast aside.

Friends, that's what Easter is. From the tomb of death and darkness, when the world put a period to the end of Jesus' life. On that Friday, they thought the story was over. Not only did they have doubts about the future of Jesus, they thought it was a done deal. THE END. E's passed on! This Jesus is no more! He has ceased to be! 'E's expired and gone to meet 'is maker! 'E's a stiff! Bereft of life, 'e rests in peace! If he wasn't lying in a tomb, he'd be pushing up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now 'istory! 'E's off the twig! 'E's kicked the bucket, 'e's shuffled off 'is mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the bleedin' choir invisible!! THIS IS AN EX-SAVIOR!! (That was for you monte python fans out there). But then the miraculous happened. Where the world put a period, God inserted a comma. Where the disciples had thought it was the end, God showed them a new beginning. Easter is a celebration of finding hope and light where we thought there was only dark and hopelessness. Easter is seeing new possibilities when all you saw was a dead end. We all celebrate our own Easter moments. It's when your doubts are cast aside and you find hope once again. That is why this is an important holiday, because it is a holiday from which we believe that all things are possible, that there are no dead ends, there is no reason to despair, the human spirit will find hope and new life. There is no trial to great for us. Your marriage might be on the rocks, your children might not be who you'd want them to be, we look at the local paper and wonder if this town has gone mad some days, we might look at the world today and say, "Where on earth are we going?," maybe your world has shattered all around you, the loss of a loved one, a bitter divorce, a health concern, a dream that has faded - you could be moving away, but Easter tells us there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

I have a pastor friend, whose son was diagnosed with a disease that could prove fatal. I neglect to tell you what it was, because I neglected to remember. He was an outdoorsy type kid, always wore outdoorsy type clothing. When the doctors told him the news, he became depressed and sullen. I think we all would be. His family rallied around him, and tried to make every day special and meaningful. They went on several small vacations together to see some sights and to spend some time together. It was on one day, a day that the poor young man felt really down, he asked his mom if they could go shopping together. This was an odd request from him, but

his mother said, "Of course." That next day, they went to the Mall in their city. They looked at Macy's and Dillard's. The teenager was not looking at his normal style of clothing that he liked to wear, but he was looking at the suits. He tried several of them on, and found one that really made him look sharp. He asked his mother if he could have it, she said "yes." The salesperson asked if they wanted to look at the shoes. The teenager said that "that wasn't necessary." And all of a sudden, it realized to the mother what they were doing. No one would see the shoes when he wore the suit next. Her son had lost hope. Her son had let the darkness of doubt win the fight. And there was nothing she could do. Two months later, two months of despair and after several more doctor's visits, the young man went to his mother and asked, "Can we buy some shoes?" Of course, they can buy some shoes, the mother assured him. That was the happiest day in that family's life! There was still danger, there was still the unknown, but hope had been restored! Faith had found its way into the heart! Not only did they buy one pair of shoes, but three pair! He was letting them know he was going to fight! He was letting them know that he would not surrender. And should he even lose his life in the battle, the disease will not win, for he had a faith and a trust in God that God will take care of him, no matter what may come. Easter came to that house that day, when the clouds of doubt and darkness gave way to hope and light and life and faith.

Thomas found his Easter a week later than the other disciples. But he came to believe. He believed so much that he went to the far east to spread the word. Maybe made China. He was martyred in India, according to legend. Think about it. Would a unsung disciple from the middle east go thousands of miles away to unknown lands where you didn't speak the language to spread something you didn't believe? Thomas found his Easter. Some of us are still looking for an Easter. Some of us are still living in the world thinking that it's still Good Friday. And I tell you, it's OK to doubt. It's OK to ask questions. It's OK to wonder if we'll ever make it through whatever it is we are facing. And God always answers. Maybe not in the time frame we want Him to, but he always answers. Easter, when God's love is shown through the darkest night. And he'll always answer. Of that, I have no doubt.

Opening:

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Good morning Oregon City UMC and online guests. Welcome to Easter. And our celebration of the Resurrection. I'm out here trying to catch the sunrise.

There's an old Easter Hymn, Christ the Lord is Risen Today. Written by Charles Wesley, the brother of John Wesley, the founder of our church. John and Charles Wesley soon found themselves out of favor with many of their Anglican brothers because of their preaching - like preaching in a way that kept people's attention and evangelical zeal. A friend for their Oxford Days, George Whitfield, was having the same trouble and George began preaching outside. In London, George asked Charles to join him one Sunday, and at a place called Blackheath, Charles preached outside for the first time before thousands. In those days, you could go to church if your family "owned" a pew. If you were of limited means, your church was not available to you. So the early Methodists went outside to find the people. Said Charles later, "My load was gone, and all my doubts and scruples. God shone upon my path; and I knew this was his will concerning me." Soon his brother John went out there as well, and the Methodist movement began. In a way, Charles still preaches, although through his hymns. At the age of 28, he wrote a "Hymn for Easter Day". The alleluia's were added later, but we know it as Christ the Lord is Risen Today. Not HAS Risen. Maybe Had Risen. IS risen. Isn't the text funny? Not past tense but present tense. He is risen. Today. In your life. In my life. Now. Let us sing, Christ the Lord is Risen today in whatever house or field we find ourselves in.

Children's Time:

Hey kids, I love Easter, I hope you do to. The candy, the bunny, the eggs, the springtime outside, and the story of a resurrected savior who brings us back to life. Have you ever wondered about some of the images we have in our Easter story? Here's a few images that we see at Eastertime, brought to you by our Worship Design Team!

Prayer:

Lord we lift our hearts to you. As the dawn breaks, may we carry the unity we share into every moment knowing that we are one with the risen Christ. Lord, we lift our eyes to you. As the sun rises, may this moment stay with us, reminding us to look for the beautiful colors of promise in your word. Lord, we lift our prayers to you. As the dew air falls, may we breathe this morning in and know that like the earth, you sustain us, keep us and work within us always. And so, we lift our voices to you. We celebrate the greatest day in history, when Jesus rose from death, defeated darkness and bathed the world in stunning resurrection light. May we ever live to praise you! In the Risen's savior's prayer we come together...

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. Easter is about bringing life to those who are dead, literally and spiritually. One of our special Sundays in the Methodist Church supports UMCOR. The United Methodist Committee on Relief - supporting people who are going through their own winters within their souls. As the humanitarian relief and development arm of The United Methodist Church, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) equips churches and individuals for ministry with persons in need. UMCOR responds to U.S. and international disasters, addresses diseases and poverty, assists refugees and immigrants, provides clean water and works to reduce hunger.

UMCOR would be unable to do this work without your support. These gifts help UMCOR keep the promise that 100 percent of any gift to a specific UMCOR project will go toward that project, not administrative costs, and allow us to direct other resources to needs around the world. Your offering brings life. Thank you, OCUMC.

Closing: On the Walkthrough, a thank you from the Worship Design Team