

## "An Okay Faith"

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

April 24, 2022 - John Knox Presbyterian Church

*John 20:19-31*

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. **Do not doubt but believe.**" Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."*

We all doubt. It is a human characteristic. We are constantly questioning is something true or not. Many times we have to have proof and see it with our own eyes to believe it. I was at Eagle Creek Park yesterday and today if someone asked me if it is still there, I would say yes even though I could not see it at that very moment. I mean how could anyone move the park in a day?

A couple of months ago, my daughter and I were going one evening to a movie. We were traveling east on 56<sup>th</sup> Street and up in the distance we saw two vehicles collide. One of them flipped over and caught on fire. There was not anyone between us and the accident. As we approached, we could see some of the people moving inside the van that was on fire. My daughter immediately called 911 as I got out to see if I could help. It was the most helpless feeling! I wasn't sure if I should get down and help the people inside the burning car for fear that I might get injured. Thankfully a policeman came upon the accident. He went to the burning car and tried to see what he could do. The other SUV had all its airbags open blocking the view of the inside. As I approached the car, I could hear some moaning. I could see two people inside but no one was moving. I told them that help was on its way.

As the emergency vehicles arrived, we decided to leave and give them room to help the people. Later that night, the news reported that one person died in the crash. It was hard to believe that within those few seconds one person went from breathing to life on earth ending. I wonder how that family is doing who lost this person. I wonder where their soul is? I question why did this happen? How did it happen? What was the cause of this? I kept thinking that it could have been us in the crash if only we had been there a few seconds sooner.

Thomas is dealing with the loss of his good friend, Jesus. He is grieving. His world has been turned upside down. Jesus tried to tell him what was going to die but he couldn't imagine it. He is wondering like the others what will come next. He is hiding and trying to make his way around Jerusalem without being spotted by the Jewish officials.

He returns to the upper room to join the others. They have some incredible news. Jesus has appeared to them even though the door was locked! He showed them his hands and his side and breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. Are you sure it was him? How did I miss him? Why wasn't I here?

Then, the doubt and uncertainty sets in and Thomas replies that he will not believe this until he can put his fingers in Jesus' wounded hands and put his hand in his pierced side. Only then will Thomas believe!

That is bold of Thomas to demand this kind of proof. But, as Frederick Buechner points out, Thomas was a realist. (Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith- Beyond Words; Frederick Buechner; Harper San Francisco - Harper Collins Publishing; 2004; p. 85) Earlier in the Gospel of John, we hear about the night that Jesus set down for the last time with his disciples and tells them that he is going to die. He will go and prepare a place for them where they can join him. In his house, there will be many rooms for all who believe. It is bold Thomas who speaks up and asks the question that everyone is afraid to ask. "How will we know how to get there? Where will we know the place that you are going?" Jesus replies, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I am not sure Thomas understood at that moment what Jesus was saying. But, in this moment and in our story today, Jesus does not respond with scolding or shame for not having the faith that Thomas should have.

No, Jesus knows that Thomas' faith is okay and it is good enough. Jesus knows that this was going to be hard. Having faith in all situations was going to be difficult for Thomas. Difficult for the disciples then and now. Believing in him when we cannot see him is downright HARD.

Frederick Buechner says this about doubt, *"Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving."* (Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith- Beyond Words; Frederick Buechner; Harper San Francisco - Harper Collins Publishing; 2004; p. 85)

Now, it is time for me to be vulnerable with you all. Honestly, even as a pastor, there are times when I ask myself is Jesus' existence true. Having faith in something we cannot touch, see or hear is difficult. I think it goes beyond that. Having faith in the silence of unanswered prayers is hard. Believing in God when horrible things happen to innocent, good people, is difficult. It is hard to believe in God's existence when people suffer from cancer when some are cured and others are not.

When all these questions lead to doubt in Jesus' existence, I find that Jesus will show up and allow me to put my fingers in his hands and my hand in his side. He does this when I see the most beautiful sunset, the promise of spring come to life in beautiful flowering landscapes, the laugh of a child with all their innocence or the gift of a precious baby.

Jesus shows up when my foreign exchange brother in the Ukraine, Viktor, is able by impossible odds to get his mother out of the suburbs of Kiev. Jesus was there when he got news that after she had arrived safely to join Viktor that her apartment and neighborhood were demolished.

Galleh and Mamudu, the two new folks from Africa, show up on our church doorsteps with only days before they need to meet the application for asylum deadline. Our risen Lord is seen when a pro-bono lawyer is willing to take both of their cases. This occurs after months of hitting brick walls. In these moments when our doubts drift away we respond just like Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus becomes so vulnerable and allows Thomas into that sacred space offering him a teaching moment - do not doubt but believe. He asks if he believes because he has seen. Then a blessing of

hope for all of us as we walk this faith journey, blessed are the ones who believe what they cannot see.

As we continue to live into this Easter season, which has just started and will not end until Pentecost, we continue to seek the risen Lord even on those tough days when it seems like the darkness will consume the light. Even when we question! Even when we doubt. And that is okay!

One of the commentaries posed this question, if Jesus allows us to touch his wounds, are we willing to open ourselves up to let others touch our wounds? If we are vulnerable enough to do this by letting down our walls and guards, will we be able to say, "My Lord and my God!" Is this another opportunity to see Jesus' existence?

Thanks be to God for the boldness of Thomas for admitting his doubt and questioning when others were not brave enough to do so. And Jesus, who loves us, accepts us and teaches us wherever we are on our faith journey. Amen.