

Order of Worship

Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021

WELCOME

Hello God, thank you for this day.

It's 9:03 and we need your help.

Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,

Connect us all through Christ's love, and

Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.

PRELUDE *Fugue in C* G.F. Handel

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 133 UMH 850

HYMN 327 *Crown Him with Many Crowns* DIADEMATA

SCRIPTURE 1 John 1:1 – 2:2

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 420 *Breathe on Me, Breath of God* TRENTHAM

SCRIPTURE John 20:19-31

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 467 *Trust and Obey* TRUST AND OBEY

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Prelude from Suite in C* H. Purcell

PRAYER CORNER

We pray for comfort and grace for Debbie, Tim, and Zoe Martin, as they grieve the loss of their dad and grandfather, Wayne Schmalfus, on April 1.

We lift up Stephanie Yonke's grieving family, including relatives Roger and Mary Mittenzwei. She was killed in a car accident on April 2, leaving behind 6 & 8 year-old children. Lord, protect and provide peace for all.

Many of the first followers of Jesus are remembered by a few limited snapshots of their lives found in the Bible. Simon Peter was bold and the first to step out of the boat, but he floundered more than once. Andrew was Peter's brother and the one who first introduced Peter to Jesus. James, the son of Zebedee, was part of Jesus' inner circle along with Peter and John. John was James' younger brother, known to be sensitive and loyal, but he tended to flatter himself. Matthew, formerly known as Levi, was a reformed customs official and tax collector. Judas was the group's treasurer who ultimately betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Aside from the obvious bad press for Judas, there is another Jesus-follower who gets an undeserved reputation. Thomas, also called Didymus (which means "Twin") will forever be known as "Doubting Thomas". It would have been cooler if historians came up with a clever nickname for Didymus like "Doubting Diddy". Whether we think of him as Thomas or "Diddy", I don't think it's helpful using him as an example of doubt to avoid. Today I hope to change the way we think about both doubt and Thomas.

In today's Good News from John 20, we read that after Mary encountered Jesus, that the resurrected Lord somehow moved supernaturally through a locked door and joined a group of disciples in a house where they were hiding. He showed them the scars on his hands where nails had held him to the cross, and on his side where the soldier's spear had pierced him to confirm he had died.

At some point in this very life-changing encounter, their fears melted away. It says, "*Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*" (John 20:20). Jesus then blessed those present: "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" (v. 21). He breathed on them and commissioned 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.*" (vs 22-23).

We will explore that last statement later, but first let's look at the next pivotal verse: "*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.*" (v. 24). We don't know why he wasn't there. The point is that God could have divinely orchestrated that everyone, including Thomas, be present for Jesus' first big Post-Resurrection Reveal. However, God wanted to show something special through Thomas.

After Jesus initially revealed himself to the disciples, they found and told Thomas, *“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.”* (v. 25). Was Thomas’ being stubborn and cynical? Was he upset about feeling left out? Did he think they were all pranking him? Though Methodists are not supposed to gamble, my money is more on the latter two options.

A week goes by and all the disciples, including Thomas, are holed up again in the same house. They are still trying to process everything that happened. They’re talking about the things Jesus used to say and trying to make sense of it all. They’re asking questions, praying, and reflecting together. For a very long week, there are no visits by angels or the resurrected body of Jesus that can walk through locked doors. I suspect that they are all starting to feel a bit of doubt nibble at their souls. If they didn’t, they would have followed Jesus’ last command to get out of their locked-up house and hearts and go share God’s forgiveness with people – even people they are afraid of or need to forgive. But Jesus comes through again – quite literally.

“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.” (vs. 26-28). Even though Jesus was speaking directly to Thomas, I am sure that everyone in the room was hanging on Jesus’ every move and word. How did he know what Thomas had told them a week ago?

Most importantly, what are we to make of that last phrase, *“Do not doubt but believe.”* The Greek word sometimes translated as *doubt* is *“apistis”*, which literally means *unconvinced* or *unbelieving*. I do not think Jesus was chastising Thomas for struggling to accept what his fellow disciples had told him the week before after their remarkable encounter with the Lord. Jesus was in essence saying, *“I’m with you even when you don’t see me. I hear every question and concern you have. In the right way and time, I will reveal myself so you can trust me.”* Jesus didn’t want Thomas to feel left out, so he showed his scars again so that Thomas would be just as convinced in his resurrection as the other disciples were a week beforehand. Jesus’ *“bonus appearance”* undoubtably strengthened everyone’s faith!

“Thomas answered him, *“My Lord and my God!”* (vs. 28). Thomas was convinced – this is Jesus! This is the Messiah! This is God, the Creator of All! Then Jesus asks Thomas a question, *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”* (v 29) We often misinterpret this verse to elevate “blind faith”, yet that is not what Jesus intended as the takeaway. I think Jesus was actually blessing Thomas for showing up and sticking with the group even after missing out on the big reveal. He is the one who had not seen but had come to believe.

There are many times in life when it is a struggle to believe in God. When people we love die too young. When there is a neglect of justice and goodness. When there is an illness in our bodies or minds that we can't shake. We might even see God work in other people's lives but feel like our needs are ignored by God. Part of why God created the church is so that we can be a safe group in which to share our struggles, ask our questions, and patiently wait, pray, and trust God to reveal his love to each of us.

Jesus is not threatened by questions, and we shouldn't be either. “Good doubt” is asking God honest questions with an open heart and mind. As Diana Butler Bass says, “Questions don't have to be a hindrance to our faith. They can be a catalyst! Questions can be the very thing God uses to show us who He is.”

My much-older cousin Mary served in the Navy WAVE in WW II and earned a degree from Asbury College long before it was common for women to do so. She became a Bible translator in the Congo with Wycliffe and taught ESL after she retired. She was a woman of great faith, but she also had her doubts. I remember her saying, “When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask God to bring out two large glasses of lemonade and sit down, because I have a long list of questions and I've waited a lifetime to hear his answers.”

I'm suspicious of Christians who have all the easy answers. It's like they see Jesus without scars. People with pain and scars of their own can eventually understand how all the puzzle pieces of faith fit together. John Wesley, who had many doubts, found that reason, scripture, tradition, and experience were all part of the equation to help us find answers for our questions of faith. May we all have a faith that seeks understanding as we trust that God will reveal himself, scars and all, as the source of all faith, hope, and love. Amen