

“Honest Doubt”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The gospel lesson for this week is taken from the book of John, chapter 20, verses 19 through 31. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. “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.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

God bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of your word today. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! The second Sunday of Easter focuses on doubt. In fact, doubt is prevalent through Holy Week, Easter Sunday, and when Jesus appeared to the disciples and finally Thomas. Doubt isn’t a bad thing. Having doubts doesn’t mean we regress in our faith; it’s part of our journey. What matters is our direction and the sincerity of our hearts.

Think about some of the emotions and events that occurred from Holy Thursday to when Jesus showed his hands and side to Thomas. At the Last Supper the disciples were silent and stunned that Jesus would wash *their* feet! Only non-Jewish males or women did that. They doubted the gesture and didn’t understand. Maybe they were focusing on their need for an earthly king and the glory that came with it.

In the garden, the disciple’s fear and doubt triggered a deep sleep that overtook them that even Jesus didn’t wake. When the soldiers and holy men arrived with Judas, the disciples soon scattered. Following that Peter stood by a fire warming himself, and a servant recognized him. He shrunk back and denied Jesus three times. Surely the disciple’s hearts cried out as they ran to hide, “Help my unbelief!”

The disciples hid behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Doubt and fear controlled their emotions. They remembered the times Jesus talked about his death

and crucifixion and that he would rise from the dead. Doubt was their enemy. They shrink back, they hide, and their confidence disappears, but they stayed together waiting and discussing their feelings that were filled with despair.

Then Jesus came and stood among them. He 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.”

Thomas wasn't present when Jesus appeared to the others. Maybe Thomas was grieving alone. When he returned, and heard that Jesus was there, he said “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.” Now he had to wait and continue doubting if it really was Jesus. Maybe that was his mistake. To have stayed with the others would have prevented him from missing Christ at his first coming. There's comfort and power in the togetherness of believers.

I admire Thomas' honesty. He didn't pretend. He said what he thought. The kind of honest doubt that Thomas had surely ends in a faith that saves. Maybe that's not an altogether bad place to be in your faith journey? Nothing wrong with honest doubt. After Thomas finished grieving, he stayed with the disciples. Missing Jesus the first time became an impetus for him to pursue the truth.

All of us have doubts, and in our faith journey doubts are areas we should pursue and seek resolve. As we stay committed to Christ, our honest doubting can lead us into a relationship with the Risen Christ; it's part of our journey. Jesus died to dispel our doubt and fear. He rose again to give us new life. Christ breathes peace into the disciples. He breathes into us a peace that's sustained through relationship.

Thomas was driven by evidence—something tangible. And in the end, he found the evidence he needed. Thing is, Thomas received so much more than just

evidence, he received his Lord and his God! He didn't jump ship. The aim of our Lord and God is what's stated in verse 28: that ". . . you may *come* to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John wants us to believe, and the word believe in this passage is a verb—an action word.

Jesus sends his disciples into the world to be a witness as verse 21 states: "As the Father sent me I am sending you." They're empowered with the Holy Spirit that was breathed into them, and the power of this relationship with Christ is something that never ends; it moves forward, it changes, and it grows.

Believing means we continue serving God in the face of our circumstances. We stay in relationship with Christ despite our many failures, irrespective of the many losses we have or the disease that consumes our bodies, or regardless of the evil in the world. God *will* provide what we personally need to continue in a relationship with him. Thomas stayed with the other believers, and Thomas' honest doubt was answered.

The question we must ask ourselves is this. Will we carry on serving God despite our doubts and circumstances or will we check out and give up? We *must* move forward, stepping over the challenging circumstances that attempt to hinder us, and stay in relationship with Christ—even if it's honest doubting.

The disciples went on and preached the resurrection of Christ in the face of threats. Will we do the same, knowing that death didn't have the last word with Christ, and it doesn't have the last word with us? The charge we're given is this.

Go and reach out to others despite your doubts. Work through the doubts you have through prayer. Our responsibility as a Church is to convey to the world that God forgives sin and is filled with mercy to the penitent. "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.” Only Christ can forgive sin, but we’re accountable to bear witness to Christ that he’s alive and present and full of mercy to forgive.

Let’s pray. Risen Christ who gives new life, keep us in relationship—despite the circumstances we’re confronted with. Help us move forward and not lose heart, but to continue to be a witness to the world through service. Amen.