

Doubting with Determination
2nd Sunday of Easter - April 19, 2020
Pastor Barnes
Text: John 20:19-31

May the love, peace, patience and grace of God continue to be with you as we “shelter in place,” to keep ourselves and others safe. This too will be a story to tell...just not yet!

I have read this gospel for better than 40 years, with Thomas taking center stage. But this year...I had to smile in a serious sort of way! For here are the disciples all gathered together in “a house” - With doors locked for fear of the Jews. We sit not with doors locked, but certainly shut for fear of facing this invisible virus!

Praying each day for an end...but also praying to keep safe those people who **HAVE** to leave their houses...in hospitals, nursing homes, essential services...those who have to get up close and personal - With the suffering of people and the invisible virus!

There is an old hymn: “O Love that will not let Me Go”

“O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee; I give Thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be.”

We grow weary. I’m sure the hospital people caring for others at a break neck pace, grow weary. And so many more, grow weary with loss and heavy days.

But, “may richer, fuller be,” says to me that Jesus came “and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”

Through our closed doors, our troubled hearts and a world reeling with this raging virus...Jesus does stand among us and says: “Peace be with you.”

Peace even amidst many people feeling panic. Peace when problems of getting the things everyone needs...food, health care, money and so on.

Peace, when concerns of where this invisible pandemic might be getting just a bit too close.

When Jesus says and offers: “Peace be with you” It is to settle your heart upon hearing: “He IS Risen!”

This is peace that offers strength, not in having any problems to face...but in how you and I face them. Knowing that Christ Jesus can and does stand where we need him...even behind “locked” doors...real or of our hearts.

That is why for me, Thomas is such an interesting person! I like the idea of “doubt with determination!”

First...Thomas either was foolish or his faith followed him out in the streets. For at the same time, his compatriots were fearful behind locked doors.

Second...unlike the two disciples on the road to Emmaus talking among themselves and then to an unrecognized Risen Jesus, said: “We had hoped.” Thomas said: Show me! He did not say...No way!

Think about this...a **WEEK** later...not a day, but seven days later...the disciples are still “sheltering in place.”

Thomas spending time out and about is finally re-connecting with the rest of the disciples...Jesus **KNOWS** about Thomas, just like Jesus **KNOWS** you!

Jesus shows up again...He didn't say: "Hey guys, what's been happening," or "why are you still here?" He goes directly to Thomas and takes this doubt of determination and gives it resolution.

Doubt is okay if you continue with determination.

I did not go directly from college to Seminary! Even though I had many people, including a couple of pastors who thought I should have. A friend in college, said, "hey take Greek." Nope. I'm a band director! I said. Yet, doubts still flickered in my faith journey.

Teaching, two years in, and I wrote seminaries. Come, visit they said. Nope. I'm a band director!

Sometimes in the midst of doubt, you have to continue to grapple with God. God doesn't mind. Just like Jesus showed up and showed his hands and side to Thomas.

You think my doubt was done then? Nope. What if I get there and I can't hack it? Or, what if I get there and discover this isn't in my ball park. I'm a band director!

In 1977, with doubt and determination held close in hand "I jumped." My wife said...you want to do what?! AND with a two year old! Well, here we are.

Peace be with you, Jesus said to fearful disciples. Peace be with you he said again, this time with Thomas.

Peace be with you...He says to YOU. In fact...the gospel writer knows about this doubt with determination. The gospel of John has Jesus saying: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

And then John adds an epilogue: Jesus did a lot more. But I have written these so you may come to believe and in believing have life in his name.

Doubt doesn't have to be disbelief.

I see pictures each day on the television news of determined hospital people...doctors, nurses, health care workers. The only thing between them and the people they are ministering to: a face mask and plastic shield and compassion. Why do they keep going in? Are they super human? Do they have NO doubts?

Maybe, even though they might not put it this way. They don't have Jesus standing in front of them...but they have Jesus...who is the Love of God in Word and en-fleshed, standing INSIDE of them.

Not a statement of faith, but a movement of heart!

It brings a lump in my throat...for I realize that they are not standing behind locked doors wondering. I realize that God is bigger than my petty wonderings of what their faith might be. Really!?

My heart keeps coming back to Romans 8: What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or perils or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him, who loved us."

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Thomas’ doubt is that of determination, not separation.

I put to you that doubt, if we “work it,” is also discovery.

When we live in “both” - the world of believing and doubting - we experience the possibility of more, not less, faith! We rely more and more on the HOLY to show us the way, to guide us in life’s paths. For as we seek, we learn more - But we also learn that there is much, much more to be learned. What we learn is that we are forever on the path, because true wisdom knows that the JOURNEY is the point of life, not the destination. Jesus says: I am the way, the truth and the life.

YES, because Easter is a gift given! Thomas was already bolder than his compatriots, But, you have to wonder as his determination satisfied his doubts...What would be “new”...when he left the house again??

It makes me wonder...We WILL leave the “house” again! I wish the pain of illness and death didn’t have to be. But...through the determination of all people...what will be different?

I would like to close playing a hymn you know: “Amazing Grace.”

Just the first verse...because I know you know the words!

Thomas demanded: “Unless I see.”

The end of verse one says: “was blind, but now I see.”

We will play through once.....then I hope you will sing that verse, because you know it....

KNOWING that Jesus stands with you and says: Peace be with you.

You are no longer blind...but now you see!

The love of God through faith gives you that vision.

Listen and Sing because Jesus walks with you!

“Amazing Grace” – Pastor & Leslie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf8oKLYFCkU&feature=youtu.be>