

Believing is Hard Work

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Thomas Sunday
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John 20:19 – 31

Text: 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.” – John 20:29

Good Morning. It is good to see you here this first Sunday after Easter, traditionally called the “Low Sunday” or “Thomas Sunday.” It got the name, “Thomas Sunday,” because it is the traditional Sunday when the doubting Thomas Bible passage is read. Not wanting to disappoint anyone, I also chose this Thomas passage for this morning’s service.

It’s interesting that Thomas has become renowned in our church history as the one who doubted the resurrection. Yet there are many other stories in the gospels that talk about doubts. Just in John alone we hear of the following doubters in the early chapters:

- In John Chapter 3 we hear about Nicodemus, the leader of the Jews, who struggled to understand – and I’m not sure he ever really did get it – what Jesus meant when Jesus said that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus was in a different frame of mind – he was stuck on the concept of being born again from a mother’s womb.
- Then in John Chapter 4, there was the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well who was drawing water from the deep well when Jesus asked her for a drink of water. She got stuck on the concept of “living water.” Jesus told her that everyone who drinks of the water from Jacob’s well will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the living water that Jesus gives them will never be thirsty again.
- Then in John Chapter 6, there was the loaves and fishes story of feeding the 5 thousand and the disciple, Philip, said that six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of the 5000 to get even a little. Jesus showed them otherwise by multiplying 5 barley loaves and two fish to feed everyone – and have leftovers.

I could go on and on with other gospel stories of doubt or disbelief about Jesus and what can be done through belief in God and the Holy Spirit, but I’ll stop there.

Doubting Thomas – We’ve been taught that it is NOT OK to be a doubting Thomas. We make fun of it. But did you ever think, that perhaps, Thomas may have just been working hard on his believing? He may have been setting the groundwork so he could tell others about the good news of Jesus. My point is that Thomas was not the only person who had doubts and needed more proof to believe, 2000 years ago, or now.

For many of us in our world today, belief does not come easy. We could actually debate that as we have become more technology oriented in our world, believing has become even harder to do. Why is that? Simple. Because we can now explain so many things by the knowledge that we have gained. Why do we need anything else, when we have knowledge to answer all of our questions?

For example, let me say a little about myself. I have a formal education as a chemical engineer, which helps me to understand much about how our world is put together, how the world works – from a chemical standpoint and from a mechanical standpoint. I also have a formal education as a business person, so I understand much about our business world, much about our financial world.

The dangerous part of all this knowledge is that I am susceptible to falling into the trap that I can explain everything from just my education, my engineering experiences or my business experiences. The dangerous part of all this knowledge is that sometimes I don't think I need extra help.

Also, sometimes all this technology and business knowledge seems to get in the way. And then I have to work that much harder to believe in the power of prayer, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to believe in the power of God. To believe that there are miracles that cannot be explained by my knowledge takes an amazing leap of faith.

So back to Thomas. Is he really different from us? After his fellow disciples, his buddies, told Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas 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.” Did you know that in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition the Sunday after Easter is called Thomas Sunday, not because of the doubting part, but more for John 20, verse 28, where Thomas says to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” The exclamation of “My Lord and my God” is held up by the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, according to my reference, because Thomas, doubting Thomas, was the first to publicly proclaim the two natures of the risen Christ: the human and the divine. Thomas clearly recognized God in the risen Christ who stood before him.

Unless of course we were presented with something concrete to touch or concrete to see, how many of you have stood in similar shoes and similar circumstances and had trouble believing?

Now, what have you done in your life that took some honest to goodness, hard work?

Let me name one more personal example, and explain the connection to believing and hard work. Raising children. Raising children was (and is) hard work. I think all of you who have kids could identify with the hard work. But in the end, all parents are unanimous in the feeling that raising children was worth it. And after all that hard work, if you were asked the question, “Do you believe in your children?” I think all of you would agree with me and give a resounding, “Yes!”

Why do you believe in your kids? One reason is that you really know them. You worked hard to support your kids getting to be the wonderful people that they are today. And you have also developed a deep love for them along the way.

Now do the same with your faith. Work hard at it, and you will find a greater depth to your belief. You will find a deep love for your faith. And you will find a greater satisfaction to this life you have on earth – and with all those you encounter.

So it is OK to say that believing is hard work! Amen!