

“Doubt?”

John 20:19-31

Have you ever experienced a moment in your life where you have experienced doubt? Have you ever doubted a story that a friend told you or facts that you read in the newspaper? Have you doubted a person in a friendship or a relationship? I’m sure that we all have had those moments in our lives. It’s something that we all experience in our lives at some point.

Sometimes when we think of doubt we’ll often consider our faith and how doubt plays a role in that. I’ve talked about doubt in our faith before, but today’s lectionary reading brings us to the famous passage where Thomas doubts that Christ truly had risen up from the dead.

In our story today, we come across Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Where he was, we don’t know, but I don’t think that is terribly important in the story. What is important is that when the other disciples told him that Christ had appeared, he had serious doubts on whether this had happened or not.

Thomas claimed that he needed more proof that Christ had arisen. He claimed that he needed to see the holes in Christ’s hand and the holes in the side of his body would he then believe that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. Little did Thomas know, that he would soon get this opportunity.

Some time passes and then Christ appears. Christ tells the disciples peace and then he tells Thomas that he should touch the hands and side of Christ’s body so that he can truly see that Christ was risen. Thomas ended his doubting and believed that Christ was what he claimed to be, risen from the dead.

This feeling of doubt about Christ being arisen is indeed something that Thomas struggled with. I’m sure that other followers of Christ struggled with the concept that he was no

longer dead. For the resurrection is such an event that stands outside of the normal human experience it is difficult to grasp and fully understand. Even in this day, after all of our studies of the text and studies into the events of Christ's life, it can be difficult to grasp the miracle that occurred on Easter morning.

Often in our faith we treat doubt like it is this horrible experience. We are often told not to doubt our faith for if we doubt our faith then we are not truly living as Christians. Many theologians throughout time have mentioned that this concept of doubt is not a bad thing. Paul Tillich states that doubt is not the opposite of faith, for doubt shows a great concern for faith. I think where the source of the doubt is crucial when determining if the doubt that we experience is genuine faith-concerned doubt, or a doubt that is driven from an outside source with less than genuine intentions.

Tillich's doubt that he speaks of comes from within the person. When the doubt is coming from within you I believe that is simply yourself showing great concern for what you believe in. I always believe that we should approach our faith critically. I don't believe that it is a good thing for us to accept our faith without question. I believe that we grow in our faith as we struggle with concepts of faith, such as the resurrection. I think by asking questions we can begin to understand the intricate details of faith. It also gives a feeling of the journey, the experience, the wrestling with faith.

If you look in the Bible, there are plenty of moments of when folks in the stories have struggled with their faith. The image that comes to my mind when we doubt our faith in a way that brings about growth is the image of Jacob wrestling with God. In Genesis, Jacob comes to the river and night, and wrestles with this entity. Jacob wrestles all night, and is eventually struck

in the hip, which is where God marked that he had wrestled with him. This is where Jacob is renamed Israel, or he who wrestles with God.

The reason I lift this image up, is that it is a physical description that we go through in our faith journey. We reach moments where we may wrestle with God and wrestle with what our faith means to us. We will experience times when our faith may be confusing to us and don't know where to go. Our wrestling may wear us down, but like Jacob, we don't have to give up.

Jacob experienced many things in his life that would cause people to doubt their faith. He experienced the loss of a child, the loss of home, the loss of family members. He even wrestled with God! Yet Jacob never gave up.

He had questions of his faith, he probably wondered if he was doing the right thing by following God. But you notice that while he had a questions and couldn't always understand why God treated him the way he did, Jacob never gave up on his faith. The doubt and concern that Jacob experienced came from within himself. Just like Thomas doubted his faith, so did Jacob at times. Yet the doubt of faith came from within.

As Christians though, we will experience times when we don't have such good doubt in our minds. We'll receive a lot of our doubt from outside sources, from places that cause us to give up on our faith. The world is tempting and doesn't understand the faith of Christ, so the world in all of its brokenness wants us to give up on our faith. Having a sound faith does not seem logical in our day and age. Yet probably more than any other point in in history, we need a solid faith that we can rely on, so that others can learn of our faith and live a life in Christ.

In our world today, there are many challenges to our faith. One of the challenges that we see in the news is that science is trumping faith and that science has all of the answers to life. I heartily disagree to this statement. I do believe in scientific concepts such as the structures of the

atom, the structure of the universe, or the idea that our world is wholly beyond our comprehension. I believe in these things. Yet I believe that the root of all of our scientific understanding of the world is in God alone.

For example I do believe in the process of evolution, but I don't believe in evolution by chance. I credit God with the creative process behind evolution. We came about on this earth because God so created it. The world of some scientists want us to believe that we came about by chance, causing us to doubt the source of life.

The doubt created by these scientists, causing us to doubt our faith, is a doubt that we need to be concerned with. I believe the forces of darkness in this world come at us from such avenues. We have people who are trying to break us of our faith, trying to tell us that what we are doing as a church is wrong. But we don't have to give in, we can work against it, showing the world that our faith is true and can make a difference in the world for good.

When I think of people that are trying to cause us to doubt our faith and cause us to bring down our faith, I think specifically of this new group of people called "The New Atheists." These are people that are purposely attacking the faith of all people, not just Christians, but all that have a faith. These people include folks such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Phillip Pullman, and many other people. These three gentleman I have mentioned have written books attacking the Bible or the faith of other people. They have a desire to rid the world of religion, because they believe that religion is what causes pain and hardship in this life. They are attacking faith for all of the wrong reasons and don't care who they bring down in their process.

The reason I bring this topic of the New Atheists is not to scare you or cause you fear in your own faith life. The reason I bring them up is that many people are becoming influenced by their thoughts. In my generation, many young people are hearing these messages of darkness and

become turned off to religion in general. They take their attacks on faith as their own gospel, and become ready to tear down the faith that has brought many good things in our society.

The doubt that the New Atheists create is not a healthy doubt. It is a doubt that puts down life. It is a doubt that condemns hope. It is a doubt that can destroy lives. This is not healthy for us. This is not healthy for us as a society. We must be prepared for these attacks to our faith, because we know that we have a message that goes far beyond a dark atheism that tries to condemn people.

We are a people that have a faith that needs to be spread in this earth that goes far beyond what these people are trying to do. We must be ready to love people who doubt what we do. We must love other people enough that we can spread good news and faith to all people. This is our mission as a church, the spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that others may have life and have life abundantly.

So today, we have covered two dimensions of doubt. We have covered the dimension of doubt that comes from within us, a doubt that causes us to think critically in our faith and actually causes us to grow in our faith and understanding of God. We've learned about a doubt that comes from the outside, from people who wants us to abandon our faith. I believe that we can navigate the complex world of doubt through one component of our faith, and that is faith in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our guide in this life of matters of faith. It is the Holy Spirit that guides us in our faith journey, causing us to grow in our faith and realize new things in our faith that we hadn't thought of before.

As we encounter struggles in our faith, we need to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By turning to our faith in times of despair we grow in our faith and we don't give in to

doubt that could destroy our faith. Whenever we feel that we may be losing in our faith to doubt, we need to turn to God and pray that we see the true light of Christ in our daily lives.

In all of this, I pray that I have made you aware of what we can encounter as Christians. I pray that no matter what happens to us, that we can have the experience of Thomas. Thomas doubted, but his faith was confirmed by Christ. We can experience what Thomas experienced in our lives by constantly being in prayer with God, praying that the Holy Spirit is with us in our lives.

I make this offer to all people that I encounter when I speak of my faith, and all people I come into contact in the ministry of the church. If at any time you reach a point in your faith where you aren't sure where your faith is coming from, then come and talk with me or any other person here in the church. As a faith community we are here to help you grow in faith and grow in the love that Christ offers to all people. No matter where you are in your faith experience, I am here to be with you in the journey and help you get through the hard times.

Today, be encouraged that doubt is not despair. Doubt can bring us closer to God and Christ. Be ready to live with Christ, and experience all that can come through a life and faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.