

4/8/18 Jn. 20: 19-31 & Acts 4: 32-35

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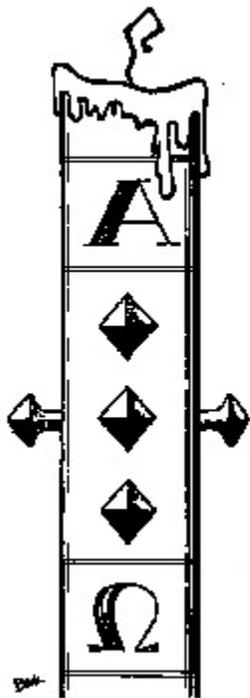
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**'UNLESS I SEE
IN HIS HANDS
THE PRINTS
OF THE NAILS
AND PLACE
MY FINGER
IN THE MARK
OF THE NAILS
AND MY HAND
IN HIS SIDE,
I WILL NOT
BELIEVE'
HE SAID TO THEM.**

ENTERING THE SCENE:

“Peace be with you.” Over and over, Jesus repeats this greeting. The cowering apostles needed to hear this message more than once in order to receive Jesus’ words of forgiveness and commissioning. Today we focus on Thomas who is a stand in for many of us as we try to accept that the resurrection is truth. Hopefully, like Thomas, once we open ourselves to this truth everything changes dramatically. Then we notice that Jesus is including us as those blessed to receive the faith from those who went before us. We stand on all those shoulders of believers who were willing to bet their lives on the grand revelation of God’s victory over death. Margot Patterson tells us; “By faith, I don’t mean signing up for a set of catechistic beliefs. I mean the recognition of wonder that pulls one’s self out of one’s self into the life of prayer.”

Jn. 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for **fear** of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**” 20 After he said this, he **showed** them his hands and side. The disciples were **overjoyed** when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, “**Peace be with you!** As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that he **breathed** on them and said, “Receive the **Holy Spirit**. 23 If you **forgive** anyone his sins, they are **forgiven**; if you do not **forgive** them, they are not **forgiven**.” 24 Now **Thomas** (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “**Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.**” 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and **Thomas** was with them. Though the doors were **locked**, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**” 27 Then he said to **Thomas**, “Put your finger here; see my hands. **Reach** out your hand and put it into my side. Stop **doubting** and **believe**.” 28 **Thomas** said to him, “**My Lord and my God!**” 29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have **believed**; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have **believed**.” 30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by **believing** you may have **life** in his name.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: The one constant thing that Jesus asks us to never doubt is God’s unconditional love. How are you doing with this challenge?

PRAYER: “Touch my wound,” you say. / Trembling with dread, / I stretch out my hand. / I fall inside you, / and universes open in me. / I see that your wound / is my own, is everyone’s / and it is limitless. / Yet you wrap yourself around it / so tenderly. / You become the shore / of that restless ocean. / I am too small to understand, / but I say, “My Lord, my God.” / I am weeping in relief. / This is all the faith I have, / and all I need. Amen.
(Mary Vineyard: Lubec, Maine)

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

FEAR: One of the things Jesus said most often was, “Do not be afraid”. When we are acting out of love, we can stand in and even welcome light. When we are acting out of fear, we seem to prefer darkness.

If you had been one of the disciples that day, would you have been afraid or affirmed?

PEACE BE WITH YOU: Peace is that condition of wholeness, contentment, and fulfillment. It is when everything is just as God intends it to be.

How is Jesus’ presence a source of peace for you?

SHOWED: To have something shown to us is to let us in on its reality.

How is Jesus letting the disciples in on his new reality? How has Jesus let you in on his reality this Easter?

OVERJOYED: To be overjoyed is to be so full of joy that you are running over with emotion.
When was the last time you were crying tears of joy because your feelings were running over?

BREATHED: In Genesis, God breathes on the new creation, and humanity came into being. John's gospel wants us to connect this event with a new creation.
How has Easter and its promise of your resurrection recreated you this year??

HOLY SPIRIT: In the Hebrew Scriptures there was a concept of the holiness of God's spirit, but until Pentecost, the people would not have experienced it personally.
If you were to try to talk about God's spirit in your life with a friend, what images would you use?

FORGIVE / FORGIVEN: To forgive is to give before you are asked. God's love enables us to recognize a need, and then ask for the gift.
What needs have you recognized in your life that needs God's forgiveness?

THOMAS: Thomas (called the twin) because he feels like our own twin at times, was hurt so deeply that he was not going to let himself be hurt like that again.
Are there any hurts in your life that you have vowed to protect yourself against like Thomas?

REACH: In the original language we see the word, *halo*, which means thrust. Jesus is willing and able to have Thomas do whatever is needed to overcome his resistance.
What do you need to "thrust" yourself into in order to overcome your resistance to being hurt again?

UNLESS: We use the word unless, when we are hesitant or fearful.
Is there anything about the Resurrection that causes you hesitation or fear?



NAIL/S: It appears that the wounds of life go into eternity with us as proof of our having overcome suffering and pain.
What 'nail' marks will go with you into eternity? Can you see them as proof of having suffered but not giving in to despair? Can you imagine them as badges of honor and love?

LOCKED: The people in that room that morning were locked in their doubts and fears.
Is there anything that causes you to lock out someone or something because of doubts or fears? Can the Resurrection help you to open the door and step out into freedom?

DOUBTING: It is said that doubt is faith's shadow. There must be a source of light to cast a shadow.
How has this Easter helped to cast light on your doubts?

BELIEVE / BELIEVED: To believe is to accept something as true.
Has there been anything in your life since last year that has helped you to deepen your belief?

MY LORD AND MY GOD: Thomas goes from doubting/fearing, to proclaiming Jesus Lord and God. He is an all or nothing kind of guy.
Do you have any feelings of being Thomas' twin? How can his witness help you as you encounter the challenges of your life?

LIFE: To have life is to be able to experience and reflect on this experience
Does John's gospel speak to your heart and help you to live more fully and lovingly?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Jn. 20:19 // Jn. 14:27; Jn. 20: 21 // Jn. 17:18; Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47f; Jn. 20:23 // Mt. 10: 19; 18:18; Jn. 20: 25 // 1 Jn. 1:1; Jn. 20: 26 // Jn. 21:14; Jn. 20: 29 // Jn. 4:48; Lk. 1:45; Jn. 20: 31 // 1 Jn. 5:13; Hos. 6:2;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Acts 5:12-16; [Ps. 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#); Rev. 1:9-19; Jn. 20: 19-31; Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 5:27-32; [Ps. 118:14-29](#); Rev. 1: 4-8; Jn. 20:19-31;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

We sometimes think that the opposite of faith is doubt, but it isn't. The opposite of faith is fear. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, but its partner. Fr. Robert Beck Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2015. Pgs 67. To order contact Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu

All proofs or demonstrations by important atheists may be enough to make the existence of God questionable, but they are not enough to put the nonexistence of God beyond question Pg. 48

Kung, Hans. *The Beginning of All Things: Science & Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2007.

Thomas, the doubting apostle, wanted to figure things out in his head. He had done too much inner work, too much analyzing and explaining. He always needed more data before he could make a move. Then Jesus told Thomas he must put his finger inside the wounds in Jesus' hands and side (John 20:27). Then and only then did Thomas begin to understand what faith is all about. Richard Rohr

"When I had drunk the spirit from Heaven, and the second birth had restored me so as to make me a new person, then immediately in a marvelous manner doubts began to be resolved, closed doors to be opened, dark places to be light; what before was difficult now seemed easy." - St. Cyprian

We don't believe instead of doubting; we believe while doubting. We're all Thomas now." Charles Taylor

The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble. -Pope Francis

Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to rouse the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood... Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed. George MacDonald (1824-1905),

My own peculiar task in my Church and in my world has been that of the solitary explorer who, instead of jumping on all the latest bandwagons at once, is bound to search the existential depths of faith in its silence, its ambiguities, and in those certainties which lie deeper than the bottom of anxiety. In these depths there are no easy answers, no pat solutions to anything. It is a kind of submarine life in which faith sometimes mysteriously takes on the aspect of doubt when, in fact, one has to doubt and reject conventional and superstitious surrogates that have taken the place of faith. On this level, the division between Believer and Unbeliever ceases to be so crystal clear. It is not that some are all right and others are all wrong: all are bound to seek in honest perplexity. Everybody is an Unbeliever more or less! Only when this fact is fully experienced, accepted and lived with, does one become fit to hear the simple message of the Gospel-or any other religious teaching. 213-214.

A faith that is afraid of other people is no faith at all. A faith that supports itself by condemning others is itself condemned by the Gospel. 214 Thomas Merton. "Apologies to an Unbeliever" in *Faith and Violence*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968:

But the Divine Being is not a being beside others. It is the power of being conquering non-being. It is eternity conquering temporality. It is grace conquering sin. It is ultimate reality conquering doubt. Paul Tillich – *Theology of Culture*

Often, confusion is the tension of trying to make sense of things too soon....let the opposing voices in your head speak. They are only finding their part in a larger, yet-to-be heard song. P-64 Nepo, Mark. *The Book of Awakening*. Berkeley, CA. Conari Press. 2000.

Thus the story of Christ, while it can be understood as a whole and in its parts as revealing divinity, can also be misunderstood; the signs can be denied. In John 20 much is made of Thomas's belief because he saw the risen Christ and believed. Future generations who believe even though they do not see are lauded. Believing in Jesus as the savior and messiah, then, has a moral aspect that cannot ultimately be reduced to logic. Analogously, while the natural world in its totality and also in its parts is consistent with the presence and creating activity of God, it can appear to the unbelieving eye to be the result of blind mechanical forces, or it can be understood as the result of processes that are enormously complex and organizing but without reference to any transcendent power. Pg. 512.

Creagan, Nicol Hoggard. *A Christian Theology of Evolution and Participation*. [Zygon](#). 6/07

The togetherness of the Christian community, however, is not the result of shared anger or anxiety; it grows from a deep sense of being called together to make God's compassion visible in the concreteness of everyday living. In the Acts of the Apostles, we get a glimpse of this new togetherness: "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common. . . Day by day the Lord added to their *community* (literally: their togetherness) those destined to be saved" (Ac 2: 44-47). The Christian community is not driven together but drawn together. By leaving the ordinary and proper places and responding to the Lord's call to follow him, people with very different backgrounds discover each other as fellow travelers brought together in common discipleship.

Nouwen, Henri, et al. *Compassion*. NY. Image Books. 1983.

Even devout believers sometimes experience s-doubt. "Doubting Thomas," Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and C. S. Lewis from the Christian tradition and Vivekananda from the Hindu tradition all entertained serious s-doubts (skeptics doubts) before becoming profoundly religious. Though some religious people have held that r-faith (religious faith) whose validity is logically demonstrated is

not true religious faith, others, especially religious thinkers who have been touched by science, tend to argue that, at least at some stage, s-doubt is a necessary precondition for faith. Thus, Michael Corey says that "God might actually prefer the critical-thinking agnostic, who eventually comes to Him through a hard-won battle of conflicting beliefs, to the mindless subservient 'believer' who hasn't even bothered to examine his or her belief structure" (Corey 1993, 289). One may wonder how this author and others seem to know about God's preferences, but the point is that honest s-doubt is not incompatible with religious seeking.
Raman, Varadaraja V. Faith and Doubt in Science and Religion. Zygon. 12/2004 Pgs. 948-9.

Doubt is the one thing that helps keep faith from becoming fanaticism.

How many people are there in the world of today who have "lost their faith" along with the vain hopes and illusions of their childhood? What they called "faith" was just one among all the other illusions. They placed all their hope in a certain sense of spiritual peace, of comfort, of interior equilibrium, of self-respect. Then when they began to struggle with the real difficulties and burdens of mature life, when they became aware of their own weakness, they lost their peace, they let go of their precious self-respect, and it became impossible for them to "believe." That is to say it became impossible for them to comfort themselves, to reassure themselves, with the images and concepts they found reassuring in childhood.

Place no hope in the feeling of assurance, of spiritual comfort. You may well have to get along without this. Place no hope in the inspirational preachers of Christian sunshine, who are able to pick you up and set you back on your feet and make you feel good for three or four days-until you fold up and collapse into despair. 187.
Thomas Merton. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. (New York, New York: New Directions, 1961).

“Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial ‘doubt.’ This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious ‘faith’ of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion.”
From *New Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1961) Page 12

The time is fast approaching when one will either be a mystic or an unbeliever. Karl Rahner

[Gospel according the Hebrews](#) (in Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 2 on James, the Lord's brother) - Also the gospel called according to the Hebrews, lately translated by me into Greek and Latin, which Origen often uses, tells, after the resurrection of the Savior: "Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth to the servant of the priest, went to James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him rising again from among them that sleep)"; and a little further on the Lord says, "Bring a table and bread" and immediately it is added, "He took bread and blessed and broke and gave it to James the Just and said to him: 'My brother, eat your bread, for the son of man is risen from among them that sleep.'"

Ignatius, [Epistle to the Smyrneans](#) 3:2 - And when he came to those with Peter, he said to them, "Take, handle me, and see that I am not a bodiless ghost."

The more we look away from the vacant grave to the future it promises, the more we are directed retrogressively to that past preceding it. "For the Easter Hope shines not only forwards into the unknown newness of the history which it opens up, but also backwards over the graveyards of history, and in their midst first on the grave of a crucified man who appeared in that prelude." Nothing in the Easter narrative, nothing in the Scripture's subsequent reflection, nothing in the church's history or in our own experience, permits us for a moment to cancel the cross, or forget the grave, because of the displaced stone. The gaping wounds in hand and side are still patent in the risen body, pathetic to behold. Pg. 74

Likewise, to say that the church is commissioned and sent that is, "apostolic," is indeed, despite some traditions to the contrary, not to deify the church as glorified body, nor to idealize its continuity, in order of in doctrine, with the apostles; rather, it is to reinforce the humanness of the church, as the buried body of Jesus Christ. Apostolicity itself betokens a church which does not exist or act or itself, and more that it is self-created and self-sustaining..... This means that participation and involvement in the world is the only way for the church to be itself. How can the church be for the world without entering into its condition? Pg. 347.
Lewis, Alan E. Between Cross and Resurrection. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001.

Blessed are you if you contemplate the Lord until you are radiant; the Lord will make his face shine in yours for the glory of all Pg. 251

It is above all, through the Eucharist, that each of us it put into real contact with Jesus Christ, dead and risen for our sakes....when the Risen Christ appears in the midst of his disciples, shut up in a room for fear of the Jews we can believe that he came not from without but from within the one heart that united them. Pg. 133

In Jesus, the resurrection is above all his total rehabilitation after having been condemned in a shameful way. It is the luminous ‘Yes’ of God as opposed to the dark ‘no’ of human beings. For this very reason, it is the irrefutable testimony that Jesus is the ultimate, final prophet of God. By suffering abandonment and putting himself in God’s hands, Jesus ran a risk that could only end well. For this he is truly blessed and his blessings are true. Sin and death, which Jesus took into his own flesh, were thus dethroned and vanquished once and for all. Pg. 241. Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S. O. The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies. Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2002.

Faith’s problem, however, is not that God is so far from us as to be unknowable, but so close to us as to go unrecognized. Lewis, Alan E. Between Cross and Resurrection. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001. Page 23.

In both John’s gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, we see this kind of false community among the early disciples before they receive the Spirit. They are described as “huddled n a room with the doors locked, out of fear.” In that state, they are physically together, under one roof, in the same house, but not a real community. Ironically, after the Sprit descends upon them at Pentecost, they burst forth from that room, go to different parts of the world, and some never see each other again, but have genuine community. Pg. 115 Rolheiser, Ronald. The Holy Longing. NY. Doubleday. 1999.

“What needs to be guarded is the life of the Spirit within us. Especially we who want to witness to the presence of God’s Spirit in the world need to tend the fire within with utmost care. . . Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers.” Henri Nouwen, “The Way of the Heart

[Faith, Doubt and Imagination](#) by Fr. Ron Rolheiser

“Wonder rather than doubt is the root of knowledge.” – Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*

But faith is the hope that God’s love is different, that whatever our limited love may be, God’s love is both its ground and radically other, in the sense that it does not have requirements. Does not need reasons, simply is. Garvey, John. Reasons for Our Hope: Why Faith is not About Certainty. Commonweal. 8/15/08 Pg. 6.

Faith is an act of a finite being who is grasped by, and turned to, the infinite. - Paul Tillich

“The eloquent man is he who is no beautiful speaker, but who is inwardly and desperately drunk with a certain belief; it agitates and tears him, and almost bereaves him of the power of articulation. Then it rushes from him as in short abrupt screams, in torrents of meaning.”– Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals and Letters

By faith, I don’t mean signing up for a set of catechistic beliefs. I mean the recognition of wonder that pulls one’s self out of one’s self into the life of prayer. Margot Patterson

Jn. 20.19–29: Appearances to the disciples. An important theme in this passage is Jesus’ post crucifixion corporeality. On the one hand, he can walk through walls in order to appear in the room with the disciples, suggesting that his body does not have the substance that it had before his death, or that the process of resurrection is not yet complete. On the other hand, he invites Thomas to touch his wounds, implying that he does indeed have a physical body with the same properties as mortal humans do. 19: Fear of the Jews is a recurrent theme (7.13; 19.38) and echoes Jesus’ prediction that those who believe in him will be persecuted just as he was (16.2–3). Peace be with you, traditional greeting (cf. Tob 12.47). 22: He breathed on them, giving them new life (cf. 3.5; Gen 2.7). Spirit, perhaps alluding to the Paraclete or Advocate (14.16, 26; 15.26; 16.7; compare the account in Acts 2). 23: Forgive . . . retain, the authority to decide who can become or remain a member of the community; in Matthew, Jesus grants this power before the crucifixion (Mt 16.19; 18.18). 24: Thomas, also known as the Twin and Doubting Thomas. Thomas’s other statements perhaps express resignation (11.16) or puzzlement (14.5). 28: Lord . . . God, a full recognition of Jesus’ being, as given at the beginning (1.1–14).30–31. Conclusion and statement of purpose. 30. Other signs, implying that a selection has been made. This book, the Gospel of John. 31: Come to believe, or, continue to believe. Pgs 194-5. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

Doubt, therefore, need not always strike us as an enemy, as a spiritual cancer. Doubt is like a space beyond the reach of a light. The area gets darker not because of something bad, not because there is nothing in the space, but rather because the light -- in this case, the light of the human intellect -- has reached its limit. It is God’s grace, then, our divine light, which takes over. [Matt Emerson](#)

If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answers to all the questions—that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself.” Pope Francis

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2015. Pgs.65-67 . To order contact Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu

