

Sermon notes - Second Sunday of Easter - April 19, 2020

Acts 2:14a,22-32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31

Living witnesses

“Tell me why I should believe you” said someone to whom I was trying to sell a used car. I had been telling him about the features and my practices of maintaining the vehicle while I owned it and he asked for more evidence. The main problem was that we didn’t know one another at all. He had answered a Kijiji ad and so this conversation was happening over the telephone. The price I had set on the used car was quite a bargain so I suspect that he was worried about some hidden problem that I was trying to sneak past him. Since I have been on the other side of a similar conversation a number of times I did not take offense at his question - I had asked the same kind of question many times in my own life. ‘Why should I believe you’ is a question that we all ask and are all asked, on a number of occasions in our lives and it is one that comes in the midst of our Easter celebrations. Perhaps it is a question we are often asked to put to ourselves - ‘why do I believe?’.

The resurrection has happened and Mary Magdalene along with some other women had actually seen the risen Jesus. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb and, in the upper room, the risen Jesus had appeared to 10 of the disciples. These are all very good reasons for the personal witnesses to believe Jesus had been raised. What a shocking but joy-filled day that must have been. If they had been asked, ‘why do you believe that Jesus was raised?’ the simple answer would have been, ‘because I’ve seen him with my own eyes.’ Unfortunately for Thomas the eye witness opportunities did not happen and the account from his fellow disciples failed to convince him completely. There wasn’t sufficient evidence for Thomas to simply accept the story of Jesus’ resurrection. Perhaps he thought that grief had addled his friends’ minds. Perhaps grief had so gripped his mind that he couldn’t conceive of such an event. Regardless of the reasons Thomas did not believe the eye witness testimony of his close friends and I for one completely understand.

Over my years of Church involvement I have heard some pretty incredible stories. There was a time when I looked at many of these things with a great deal of scepticism. I still often reserve judgement when listening to a tale and I can almost hear myself saying, ‘why should I believe you?’ The evidence was obviously convincing for the person telling the story but it is sometimes not enough for me. Even when a close associate gives an account of something I find myself asking ‘why should I believe this?’. So I understand Thomas coming away from the very unbelievable sounding story with some questions and reserving judgement. I also understand the many people who look sideways at me when I proclaim the message of the Good News of Jesus and the claims of God’s promises when they ask under their breath, ‘why should I believe this?’. My answer, like the answer from the 10 disciples to Thomas, is ‘because I’ve experienced it myself’, but just like Thomas the answer is sometimes, ‘unless I see.... I will not believe’. The sharing of the Good News, or any news, never comes with a guarantee that it will be believed (or accepted).

The story of Thomas is always read on the Sunday after Easter. The reasons for this are many but I

believe one of the primary reasons is that Thomas represents all of us who have been and who will be faced with unbelievable sounding news. The message isn't that Thomas' doubting was an evil thing but rather it was a way in which we again see the compassion of Jesus. The bonds of fellowship kept Thomas in the circle of disciples and their willingness to include him in their next meeting was an act of grace on their part. This small picture of our own Church gatherings that allow for unbelief to live alongside belief is a beautiful thing in my opinion. Into that gathering steps the risen Lord Jesus who gives to Thomas the reason to believe. How like our Church family. At any given time we encounter people in our midst who, for one reason or another, are not on the same page as we are when it comes to our understanding of the truths of God. We encourage them to remain with us and enjoy our relationships while we all wait for the next appearance of the risen Saviour. He doesn't enter locked rooms as He once did but the Holy Spirit enters locked hearts on a pretty regular basis. I have had the pleasure of hearing that people have had an encounter with God during one of our regular events. It was for them, I believe, much like Thomas' encounter - seeing is believing. When we gather once again in the aftermath of Covid-19 we will have the opportunity for these kinds of encounters to occur in our midst. While we are meeting with God in our homes we have the same opportunity in a much different form. As we read our scriptures and think about their meaning we may find ourselves saying along with Thomas, unless I see..., and in that moment I would encourage us all to pray for Jesus to bring us the evidence we need. As we sit in our homes we can also be in that upper room gathered with the others who believe and who love us as we all wait for our next encounter with the Risen Lord.

In the meantime what can we do? How can we share the Good News of Jesus Christ from behind our walls? First, I would suggest, is to meditate on the reasons why you believe in this message. Who told you about it or how did you come upon your confidence in its truth? Which areas of the message are you still having trouble believing? Second, pray for God to reveal to you what you need at this time. Wait upon the Lord for the answer by going about your regular activities with an open mind and heart. Third, pray for the people in your life to have an opportunity to encounter Jesus in some way during this forced isolation period. Lastly, ask God to let you know to whom he wishes you to reach out either by telephone, email, letter, or other means and pray about the message. Remember that they may not believe you right away but as you walk with them and demonstrate in your own way the truth of the message they may just come to believe.