

April 24, 2022 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter - A reflection

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

Stop Doubting but believe!

I received a telephone call the other day which informed me that if I didn't provide certain information to the caller the police would be coming to my door to arrest me. An email later that day warned me that my bank account had been compromised and I was to use the link provided in the email to correct the problem. The world is full of people trying to convince us of something that isn't true in order to extort or steal money from us. Thankfully I have learned how to discern the truth from fiction in these cases but the criminals continue to develop new ways of putting forward false claims in ways that are almost believable. Like many others I have made it a practice to not believe the unsolicited claims received over the telephone or internet and, so far, I haven't fallen victim to any scams. The fact that these false claims are so prevalent has often caused me to ask 'What evidence do I require to believe?' My first line of defense is that I consider the source of the information that I'm being asked to believe. Is the information coming from a 'trusted news source' or is it being delivered by someone who is known to exaggerate. We live in a world where technology has a much greater impact on our lives than in the past and so we have all had to become a bit more savvy when it comes to discerning the truth of information we receive. We have all learned that not everything we see on Facebook is true. We have all learned to sift information in new ways because of the sometimes helpful, or not so helpful, social network platforms. We, who are tellers of a wonderful story need to be aware of these factors because the people to whom we tell the stories are skeptical of things that sound too good to be true.

The story of the Resurrection, which has been told for over two thousand years in many different languages and cultures, has the feature of sounding too good to be true. In the midst of the story, particularly Luke's version, there is evidence of prejudice regarding the source of the news. When the women returned from the tomb, even though there were at least four of them, we are told that the eleven remaining apostles thought their words were 'idle tales'. The women had been eye witnesses to the empty tomb and the message from the 'glowing messenger' and yet the eleven apostles chose not to believe the women's testimony. I would like to think that I would have reacted differently to the news the women shared but I am also aware of times when I have dismissed wonderful news partly because of the source. So I ask, what sort of evidence do you require before you truly believe in news that is shared with you?

The events of the day of Resurrection are recorded by each of the 4 evangelists and they all agree that the disciples did not at first believe in the testimony that Jesus had been raised. In this case, according to the testimony, seeing was believing. The version of the story told by St. John sees 10 of the apostles meeting in the upper room where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus with all the doors locked. They had likely met to talk about these crazy rumours when into their midst stepped the risen Christ. We are told that Thomas wasn't with them on that evening and so missed out on the 'seeing is believing' moment that the other 10 apostles shared. It is somewhat understandable to me that even the evidence of his closest associates telling him the news was not enough for Thomas to believe but he, at least, attended their next Sunday evening meeting. When Jesus appeared to the 10 apostles on the day of Resurrection it was with twofold gift. First Jesus offered them God's peace and then he breathed into them the Holy Spirit of God. The peace that passes all understanding and the Spirit which had been promised that would remind them of all Jesus had said to them were the gifts imparted on that occasion. With these two tools in their hands they were told that 'If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any they are retained'. With these actions and words these normal human beings were invited to share the work of God for, as was observed in a story recorded in Mark's Gospel, only God has the power to forgive. (Mark 2:5-11) Their belief in the Resurrection brought with it the partnership in God's work of restoration and a level of authority that is really quite astounding. Thomas missed out on this blessing for a period of time because of his absence from the first meeting and his unwillingness to believe unless he saw for himself. Since the other disciples had seen before they fully believed it seems fair that Thomas be given the same change to see for his own eyes.

When Jesus appeared for the second time in that locked upper room Thomas was in the company again. He too was given the opportunity to see and believe and therefore receive the same blessing that the other disciples had received. The only note of criticism that came from Jesus was the statement that those who believe without seeing will also be blessed. From that day onward we know that Thomas was once again a full part of the work of God and tradition holds that he traveled to India and brought the Good News of Jesus Christ to that part of the world convincing those who had not seen to believe. We also know, from the account recorded in Acts, that the other apostles like John and Peter were used by God to spread the message throughout Jerusalem in powerful ways.

So, what evidence caused you to believe this seemingly unbelievable news about a dead man being raised to life and going on to live for ever at God's right hand? You and I have not been given

the opportunity to actually see the risen Christ except perhaps in our minds so initially we may have believed because our parents or another trusted adult told us the story. Subsequent events and our own reading of the eye witness accounts may have cemented that belief and over time various types of evidence may have further confirmed it. We are all part of those generations who are asked to trust the testimony of those who actually witnessed the resurrection. At the same time we too are included in that work of God. The blessing of God's peace can also be ours as can the breath of the Holy Spirit. We too are given some responsibility over forgiveness and telling others the Good News. Through St. John's writing we are urged to do these things in order that those who hear will 'believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and through believing they may live in his name'. This is our task - to share the news of the resurrection, to offer God's forgiveness to those who have offended us and to urge others to believe as we believe. In this skeptical society that may not be all that easy and the fact that a greater number of households no longer share the basic story of Jesus within their homes doesn't help either. Like Thomas the people we encounter may need some further evidence before they believe and that part is as much up to God now as it was on the day when Jesus made a second visit to that upper room. The life we lead and the stories we tell about Jesus and his influence over our lives may indeed be used by God to convince someone of the truth of the resurrection and through that belief they will have 'life in Jesus' name.' It will likely require some polite persistence to convince some but in the actions of Jesus following the resurrection we see that patience and persistence demonstrated in many ways - Thomas, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the 'fish fry' with the disciples and so on.

What evidence do you require to believe something? How does knowledge of yourself influence how (or if) you speak about your life with Jesus? Can you 'stop doubting and believe?' It is my prayer that as we continue our journey with Christ through the season of Easter we will be blessed with a growing confidence in the truth of the testimony found in scripture and upon the lips of those who have come to believe in this wonderful news. The Lord Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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