

“STOP DOUBTING AND BELIEVE!”

John 20:24-29 | Second Sunday of Easter | April 4/7, 2024

[Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Jesus

In the name of our risen Savior:

In 1940 and 1941 Nazi Germany carried out a merciless campaign of bombing raids against the city of London. This terrible time is known simply as the Blitz. One night a father and his young son ran from a building that had been struck by a German bomb. In the front yard was a large bomb crater. In desperate need of cover, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow. Terrified, the boy said, “I can’t see you, papa.” The father, seeing his son’s silhouette against the red-tinted sky, called, “It’s OK. I can see you. Jump!” The boy jumped. In spite of what his eyes told him, he believed what his father said. He trusted his dad.

The portion of God’s Word before us today is really about trust. It’s about trusting in the risen Christ as our only Savior. It’s about trusting God to keep his promises. Today the living Savior says to us weak, sinful, doubt-filled human beings, “STOP DOUBTING AND BELIEVE!”

I. Put your faith in the risen Christ

The first Easter Sunday was a busy one. Not only did Jesus rise bodily from the grave just as he said he would, he then appeared to a number of his followers. He

appeared to Mary Magdalene who couldn’t find his body. He appeared to the other women who wanted to honor him with a proper burial. He appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Finally, he appeared to ten of his disciples, gathered behind closed doors.

I say ten because two were missing. Judas, tragically, had despaired and taken his own life. Thomas wasn’t there either. We don’t know where he was. But he wasn’t with these ten men who were cowering in that room. They were cowering in fear of the Jewish leaders. These leaders had managed to put their Teacher to death. No doubt the disciples were afraid that the ones who had murdered the Teacher were going to try to do the same to the students.

These men were in shock. They had seen their Lord cruelly put to death. They had seen his empty tomb and heard reports of his resurrection. But they didn’t know what to make of it all. They were just plain scared. But then, Jesus appeared to them, and their shock and fear was changed to peace and joy. But not Thomas. He wasn’t there. He still had his doubts.

Fast forward one week. Again, the disciples are lying low. But this time there

are eleven gathered in that dark room. Thomas is with them. His fellow disciples had tried to convince him that Jesus was alive. They told him again and again, **“We have seen the Lord!”** But Thomas was stubborn. He was one of Jesus’ closest disciples. He was capable of clear confessions and great acts of faith. But his momentary refusal to believe that Jesus had risen earned him a nickname he would never shake: Doubting Thomas. **“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.”** Thomas figured his own two eyes were better than the twenty belonging to his brothers. Even worse he thought his senses of sight and touch were better than the Lord’s own promises. He wanted to “follow the science.” He demanded proof.

Every one of us has a little doubting Thomas in us, don’t we? Even the most faithful Christians struggle with doubt. Remember the man who came to Jesus because his son was demon possessed? He said to Jesus: **“If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** (Mark 9:22-24) We can relate to that man’s prayer, can’t we? Like him, like Thomas, we struggle with an Old Adam. We struggle to overcome the unbelief that is ours by nature.

Sometimes we doubt. When things aren’t going our way, when stress piles up, when

life seems to be falling apart around us, we doubt that God is really in control. We doubt that he is with us as he promised. We doubt that he knows what he’s doing. We doubt that he does everything out of love. We doubt that he will keep all his promises. We doubt that he lives and rules all for our good.

When we are struggling with our sinful nature, when we have fallen again and again, when the specter of guilt haunts our sleepless nights, we doubt that God really forgives all our sins, especially those for which we struggle to forgive ourselves.

Our doubt insults God. Doubt is really the same as calling him a liar. Finally, when we doubt, we break the First Commandment. We fail to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Too often we favor the evidence of our eyes or the voice of our hearts over God’s own Word.

I think we struggle so much with doubt because we place our faith in the wrong thing. Sometimes we place our faith in our faith.

Think of using your debit card. When you pull that card out to pay for some groceries, it isn’t going to matter whether you pull it out of a battered old wallet that’s falling to pieces or a golden box encrusted with diamonds and jewels. What matters is what’s in your account. What matters is that the money deposited is legal tender, not Monopoly money.

My point is this: Every Christian wants to have a stronger faith. That’s good! But what really matters is not how strong or

weak our faith is, but the content of our faith – what we believe in. Faith needs a proper object. There is only one proper object for faith: Jesus. Friends, don't ever rely on the strength of your faith. Instead rely on the grace of your Savior. Don't trust in your faith. Trust in Christ.

He is risen! Jesus lives! The risen Lord Jesus is money in the bank. Trust in him! By his sinless life in our place, he met his Father's holy demands. God gives us the credit for that life. By his innocent death on the cross he made full payment for our sins. **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). By his glorious resurrection he proved his victory. We are forgiven all our doubts. We possess eternal life right now. These things are facts. They are certain. How do we know that they're certain? Because God, in his Holy Word, says so.

II. Base your faith on his trustworthy Word

Listen again to our text: **Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."**

Thomas demanded proof. Though he had no right to make such a demand, Jesus, in grace and great patience, gave him the proof he demanded. The living Lord stood before Thomas in the flesh and said, "Go ahead. Touch me. Stop doubting and believe that I am alive." And Thomas, who sadly is most often only remembered for his doubt, made a beautiful confession of faith. He looked at Jesus and said, **"My Lord and my God!"** He realized that standing before him was the only Savior

of the world, true God and true man in one person. He placed his confidence in the risen Christ.

Jesus accepted his confession and his worship, but then added something we all need to hear. **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

Jesus' public ministry lasted about three years. Think about how many people saw Jesus during that time. Think about how many walked and talked with him. Think about how many witnessed his glorious miracles with their own eyes. Think about how many heard his words with their own ears. And then think about how many of them stubbornly rejected him as their Savior. Seeing is not believing.

It's the other way around: Believing is seeing. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **We live by faith, not by sight** (2 Cor. 5:7). The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that (11:1). Peter wrote in his First Epistle about faith in Jesus: **Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy** (1:8).

As we will confess in the creed in a few moments, we believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again. We believe that he once walked on this earth, and we believe that he is coming again. We believe that we are going to spend eternity in a place we have never been because of something a man we have never met did on a cross 2,000 years ago. We believe in

this not because we are so smart, or because we are so dumb, or because we opened the doors of our hearts and invited Jesus in. We believe all of this because the Spirit, through the gospel, implanted the miracle of faith in our hearts. We believe this because **we have been born again ... through the living and enduring Word of God**" (1 Peter 1:23). Dear friends, if God's Word says it, that settles it. **God is not a man that he should lie** (Numbers 23:19). Base your faith on God's trustworthy Word. Trust in his promises. You won't be disappointed.

I began with a story from World War II. I'd like to close with another. During the Blitz an English woman was asked how she slept so soundly through the terrible nights of bombing. This was her explanation: "The Good Lord promised that he would watch over us and be with us always. I trust him. There's no point in both of us staying up all night." I doubt that any of us would criticize someone for not sleeping well during the Blitz, but the simple, child-like faith of that woman is admirable. She believed in the living God. She took him at his Word. She trusted his promises. My friends, imitate her faith. Listen to your Savior. **"Stop doubting and believe!"** God grant this to us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

S.D.G.

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