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# Don't Doubt, Thomas!

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 16 April 2023

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

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Jesus speaks these words to Thomas, when Thomas has finally overcome his skepticism and realised that Jesus is the Lord God. We are all in this boat together: we have not seen Jesus, except for a few lucky souls who may have seen visions. We have the witness of those who did see, and walk and talk, with Jesus; these are the Gospel stories we read every week. And we are blessed if we believe based on what others have told us about Jesus.

In my native United States, each state has a nickname. California is the Golden State, for that's where we had our gold rush, around the same time the NZ gold rush was on down in Otago. Nevada is the Silver State, for they have still-active silver mines there. (Actually, you can mine just about anything in Nevada; they have a great wealth of minerals.) Florida is the Sunshine State. Oregon is the Beaver State. And up in the northern central part of the country is Missouri, which is the Show-Me State, so called because the residents of Missouri are famously sceptical and hard to convince. “I won't believe it until you show me.” Hence, the Show-Me State.

Who does this remind us of? Dear old Thomas has come down to us through history as Doubting Thomas, who would not take the word of his fellow disciples. Why wouldn't he take their word, I wonder — after all, they have all been travelling around and about with Jesus for a few years, and they have all seen many wonderful things: healings, miracles of various kinds, the multiplication of bread and fish. They've even seen death cheated, as in the case of Jesus' good friend Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who was brought back to life after four days in the tomb. However, coming back to life after public execution is pretty rare, so maybe dear old Thomas might be forgiven for doubting his friends' stories.

The world is full of doubters. The more famous ones write books about it, like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. People deny God's existence everywhere, here in NZ and around the world. Many people, if you talk to them about it, will say they need proof. The story of Jesus' resurrection is too difficult to believe, but if you can prove it to them, if you can come up with some equation or physics experiment that will determine beyond all doubt that God exists, then they might believe you. But anything short of this just won't do it. And this in spite of the fact that they have nothing to lose by following Christ, and everything to gain. I'm talking about the bulk of society, those basically good people who go through their lives working jobs, raising families, living in town or in the country, making friends and enjoying the weekend. They're not bad people, and they aren't likely to be breaking any of the Ten Commandments. If these people decided to believe in God, it would be only gain for them. But they won't — they would need the laboratory proof, the certificate of authenticity, before they would say, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

This is not to say that faith is a light thing, or that one should believe in God because it's a safe bet, or it seems like a good thing to do, and I wasn't doing anything else today anyway. No — faith in God is a commitment, which deepens over time, as God develops our faith within us. For once we choose to believe and truly hand our lives over to Christ, we are a work in progress, a work of God. God works in us to shape us into the person he always intended us to be, which we couldn't become by ourselves. God moulds us in various ways so as to be worthy of him, and more fit to share eternal life in his care.

But the first step is to accept Christ in our lives, and to be baptised. In the case of an infant baptism, as we've had today with little Scarlett, her parents accept Christ on her behalf. It is a great gift which Michelle and Andrew have given their baby daughter, putting her forward to receive the Holy Spirit, and it is one we all celebrate. As Scarlett grows and matures, we pray that she will let the Spirit guide her, and live in the grace of God. It is our responsibility as fellow

Christians to offer our help to her to do so. She is now part of the family of Christ, and we are her brothers and sisters.

May she and we grow in faith and our knowledge of God, through prayer, through the Bible, and through our fellow Christians. God is with us, in our hearts and in our heads. Be not like Thomas, who doubted, but give thanks to God in all things, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.