

The Second Sunday of Easter
24-04-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 5: 27-32	Peter and the apostles boldly proclaim Jesus and The Holy Spirit to the Jewish leaders
Psalms 118: 14-29	The Lord is my strength and salvation Rejoice and give thanks
Revelation 1:4-8	Greetings in the name of the Trinity and Doxology
John 20: 19-31	Jesus appears to the disciples behind locked doors Thomas story of Doubt followed by belief

Introduction

In our reading from John's Gospel today we hear the story of how Thomas moves from a position of doubt to believing that Jesus is actually God, and we hear him declare to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!'

Today, I would like to look at how those first disciples overcame Doubt. How their witnessing the resurrection and being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit enabled them to acknowledge who Jesus was, and to follow Jesus in their lives.

And I would also like to look at how the same can, and should, happen in us, as Christians today.

Thomas and Doubt

In the gospel today I believe it was only natural and normal for Thomas to have doubt. The Romans knew how to kill people. The disciples had witnessed the crucifixion. Jesus had been buried. And then like now, when someone dies, they normally stay dead.

In terms of the Christian Faith, I believe that doubt can be positive as long as you move through it.

Previously in John's gospel we know that Jesus had already made some pretty big claims about himself. In chapter 14 when Jesus said he was preparing a place for the disciples and Thomas said he didn't know how they would get there, Jesus replies to Thomas, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Poor old Thomas, throughout history he has become known as Doubting Thomas. I believe this is an unfair label, because as we have heard today when Thomas was able to see what the other disciples had seen, then he too believed. Thomas was able to move from Doubt to Faith.

How the first Disciples overcame Doubt

So how did those first disciples overcome doubt in who Jesus may have been and come to a position of faith.

The first way they overcame doubt, was because they were witnesses to the Resurrection. They saw Jesus, they listened to Jesus, they shared meals with Jesus. Even though it is clear that Jesus was in some ways different, and appeared differently, it was also still apparent that he was physically there with them. It wasn't that they were all having the same hallucinations together, or something like that.

The second way they were able to overcome doubt, was due to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them. In today's Gospel reading we hear how Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." We hear about the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 1:2, "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters". And then throughout the Old Testament we hear how the Holy Spirit comes to particular people for particular tasks. After the resurrection of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit changes. In the book of Acts chapter 2 we hear the story of Pentecost, and how the Holy Spirit is available to all believers.

So, the first disciples came to faith in who Jesus was through witnessing the resurrection and by being empowered by the Holy Spirit. And what was the result in their lives. The result was a massive change. They developed a new boldness, and a capacity to share the "Good News" of Jesus with others. Peter went from denying he knew Jesus on the night before the crucifixion, to standing up before crowds and the religious leaders, even under the threat of great punishment, and declaring that Jesus had risen from the dead, and was the only way to forgiveness.

How do we move from Doubt to Faith

We can come to this faith in the same way. We can't see the resurrection like those first disciples, but we can know from their witness and believe. As Jesus says to Thomas in today's reading, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." And we can certainly ask for and receive the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

But not being actual witnesses is different. The 10th century theologian Anselm of Canterbury, gave us this famous maxim, “Credo ut intelligam”, which translated from Latin to English reads, “I believe so that I may understand”, and then he went on to say,

“I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand”

We can't grow and develop a faith, until we first have a faith. We need to begin by placing all of our faith, and all of our hope, and all of our trust in Jesus.

I'd like to look at two examples, first a positive and then a negative of what faith is.

So firstly, a positive story. When our son Luke was young, in the early years of primary school he came to me with a question, as children often do. He said, “Dad, what will happen to us if Jesus comes tomorrow?” We had an interesting discussion about how wonderful it would be for all those who trusted in Jesus, but the more wonderfully positive thing that I took out of the question was that he had accepted and taken on board that Jesus would come again. Though he was still only a child he believed in who Jesus was and that he was coming again.

And secondly, a negative story, where I believe the person had not moved from doubt to faith. It occurred in a hospital, and in a conversation, someone said to me that they were waiting for God to “tap them on the shoulder” to let them know that God was real. I'm not sure what they thought the “tap on the shoulder” might feel like, but I did try to explain to them, that we may not always get such a sign if we don't first accept what Jesus has done for us.

Conclusion

The presence of doubt can be a normal part of coming to faith. We hear today how Thomas moved from doubt to faith. Faith does not mean that we can know all there is to know, but it does mean we can know enough to trust God implicitly.

In the letter to the Hebrews we hear these words, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Thomas moved from doubt to faith through witnessing the resurrection and the power of Holy Spirit in his life. We also need to trust in the resurrection and ask God for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, so that we too might move through our doubts and have our faith strengthened. Amen.