

Reflection - Second Sunday of Easter  
16/04/2023  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 2: 14a, 22-32 Peter proclaims Jesus' Resurrection  
Psalm 16 Joys of life in companionship with God  
1Peter 1: 1-12 Praise to God for a living hope in Jesus  
John 20: 19-31 Jesus appears to the disciples, then  
Jesus appears to Thomas

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian Faith, and so today I would like us to look at the challenge the Apostle Thomas faced, in his doubt about this. Now I know talking about doubt doesn't sound very positive, But I'd also like to talk to you about the opposite of doubt. But what is that opposite? Some of you may have thought of Certainty, others may have said Belief, I've chosen to use the word FAITH.

As we look at both doubt and faith I'd like to pull the two together and see how we move from doubt to faith.

Firstly ... Doubt.... The dictionary says doubt is "to be uncertain in opinion about, or to distrust, or undecidedness in opinion or belief". From this we can see that doubt doesn't talk about a strong conviction either way about an issue. It talks about uncertainty. Doubts themselves are not necessarily bad, because doubt can lead to questioning and questioning can lead to answers. If we ever have doubts we need to share them and ask questions. A silent doubt will rarely find an answer. It is rather by acknowledging doubts asking questions, and getting answers that our faith can grow. Doubt that leads to stubbornness however can certainly harm us. We will all have doubts at one time or another, we are all human, but if our faith is to grow and not be killed off by doubt, we need to get answers to our questions. We need to be strong and find others within our faith community who can help us.

There are many biblical examples of those who have had doubts and overcome them. Take Abraham, a great patriarch of the bible, the founder of the Jewish nation, he had doubts about God during his life. When God told Abraham he would give him possession of the land, Abraham questioned God.

"O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it"?

And when Abraham was 99 years old and God told him he would bless his wife Sarah with a Son, Abraham fell face down and laughed to himself.

Even Abraham who is acknowledged for his great faith, such as when he was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac, had times when he doubted God. Abraham always turned back to God though and the key verse about Abraham in the bible is in Genesis and reads: "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness".

Moses, the great leader who brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and led them back to the Promised Land also had times where he doubted God. When he first approached Pharaoh to release the Israelites to worship in the desert, Pharaoh treated them more harshly and ordered them to do additional work. Moses returned to the Lord and said

“O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon these people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon these people, and you have not rescued your people at all”.

But God kept on using Moses and Moses kept on being obedient to God. Eventually God used Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land.

There are many other examples of people doubting God in the Old Testament. The Israelites doubted God would be with them when they stood in battle against Goliath and the Philistines, and it took the faith of David, who was still a young man to show them God’s will.

And now let us look at the doubts of Thomas that we’ve heard in today’s Gospel. I personally feel for poor Thomas, we don’t know why he wasn’t in the room with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. It could so easily have been one of the other eleven like James or John or Andrew who was absent, but it was Thomas. In Luke’s gospel we hear how Mary Magdalene and the other women told the disciples of the angels and how the angels told them that Jesus had risen. And what was their response? “They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”

So today some 2000 years after the event, when we hear the words “Doubting Thomas” we think of someone who doesn’t believe. But Jesus didn’t wipe Thomas, on the contrary when he appeared again to the disciples, he specifically sought him out.

We hear Thomas move from doubt to faith.

We hear his most profound words.

We hear Thomas acknowledge Jesus, not only as a man raised from the dead, but also as God. When Jesus shows Thomas his body and tells him to stop doubting and believe. Thomas confesses “My Lord and My God!”.

And how do we move from doubt to faith. It is the same as with Thomas. We need to confess Jesus as our Lord and acknowledge him as God. Anything less is not enough. We must turn to Jesus and wholeheartedly accept him as Lord of our lives.

And what is faith. I found this definition:-

Faith is a constant outlook of trust towards God, whereby human beings abandon all reliance on their own efforts and put their full confidence in him, his words and his promises.

Faith is more than just believing God exists. Even the devil believes that. We hear Peter proclaiming faith in Jesus in our reading from Acts this morning and when the people heard

this they were cut to the heart and asked him what they should do. Peter replies: “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

It is in baptism that we turn to Christ, and acknowledge him as Lord. We need to continue to do this in our lives.

But wouldn't it have been easier for us and wouldn't it have been marvelous if we could have been like Thomas, and seen Jesus for ourselves. The questions we could have asked him directly, the thrill of being able to sit and listen to him, Jesus. The possibility of being touched by him.

We cannot do that though, but you know what? Jesus talks of us when he talks to Thomas. 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' Jesus is talking about you and I, and every other Christian over the last 2000 years who've believed and had faith but haven't actually seen Jesus since he ascended into heaven. We now see Jesus in our faith communities in a different way. Today we can see Jesus in the faces of those around us, in our faith community, in those who serve and help others, and in the sacraments we receive as part of the church.

We are reminded and greatly encouraged in Peter's first letter we've heard this morning; Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

In the readings today we hear of the great joy and peace we can have in Jesus. Not just a fluffy sort of happiness, but a joy which is deep, a joy which gives us meaning and hope, and a peace which passes all understanding, even in challenging times like we face in the world at this time.

As we continue on life's journey today let us remember that we move from doubt to faith by confessing Jesus as Lord. It will be natural to have doubts, but we should use these positively to enrich our faith. And as we continue in this faith we can be assured of God's love for us.

I'd like to conclude with the same words Thomas used as he saw Jesus, that we might be encouraged by them and also confess them.

Thomas said to Jesus, “My Lord and My God!”.

Amen.