

Easter Trust.

Text: John 20:19-31

1) The Turmoils Of Honest Doubt

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Blessedness of Lively Trust

101, 179, 765, 321, 520

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 20:19–31, ¹⁹ *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”* ²⁰ *When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* ²² *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

²⁴ *Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*

²⁶ *And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!”* ²⁷ *Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”* ²⁸ *And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

³⁰ *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;* ³¹ *but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are living in times of doubt. Doubts — and especially in terms of our text, religious doubts — are nothing new.

As we look at the Scripture lessons for the day, we see that in one way or another they all tie into this same old problem of doubt, and the same old blessing of faith.

In the text we see doubting Thomas becoming confident Thomas as our Lord calls him from wavering to sureness in the truth of the fact of His resurrection from the tomb.

On the basis of the text let us consider the theme, *Easter Trust - The Turmoils Of Honest Doubt and The Blessedness of Lively Trust*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Turmoils Of Honest Doubt

Doubt Is Natural

Nothing is more natural for a human being than doubting. However religious we may be, the desire to have answers and the ability to question things are right there with us. Thomas would not believe the report of the resurrection. He wanted proof. Without this proof, and on his own terms, he would not believe.

It is not that Thomas did not love the Lord. It was not that he went around looking for religious truths to challenge. He was simply “realistic.” He was not afraid to face the facts, no matter how unpleasant they might be.

Like the time when Jesus had His face set toward Jerusalem, when He started out on that journey that would lead straight to the cross, it was realistic Thomas who spoke up and said, “*Let us also go that we may die with Him.*”¹

For Thomas there were no easy answers. Life was real. Pain and death were real. And dead people simply did not come back from the grave, no matter how much they might be missed or loved.

The first time Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas was away, perhaps off in some private corner, mourning for his Master. It is understandable that a

realist like Thomas would demand some real, down-to-earth proof for such an unexpected and unlikely happening as the Lord's life again from the dead.

Thomas said, ***"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."***

Every year, as we read this declaration of disbelief, we shudder a little because Thomas is the spokesman for all of us in some way. It is a rare person indeed who has never said about any part of Christian truth, ***"But if I could only have some proof! How much firmer my faith could be! If I could only have some living, speaking evidence! Like the appearance of a dead person. Like some direct vision from God. How great that would be! How sure I could be!"***

Needless to say, the numbers of the Christian church would double overnight. But God does not work this way. Our seeing a resurrected body is as unlikely today as it was then. And doubt is as natural for us as it was for Thomas.

Doubt Is As Old as Man

This disciple has the unfortunate nickname "Doubting Thomas," as if doubt was his greatest characteristic, or as if he was the world's champion disbeliever. But as we see, there is nothing spectacular or new about his doubt — or any doubt. It is a problem as old as the human race.

In the account recorded in Genesis, the first sin of our human parents was not the sudden discovery of nakedness, but the creeping doubt of human pride and self-exception, that is, Eve making herself an exception to the rule.

We read in Genesis 3:1–6, ***¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"***

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Remember that Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression as we read in 1 Timothy 2:14. Note also that Romans 5:12 says that through Adam “sin entered the world.” This is because of his headship as Eve’s husband.

Looking at Eve we can see that the doubt, lead to disbelief, and then to disobedience, and thus mankind fell.

In the same way it is nothing new that you and I, that Christians today should have doubts. Throughout the Old Testament and the New, the heroes of the faith have at times been among the greatest doubters.

Take Abraham, for example. Known as the father of the faith, he was a man of great trust toward God. Yet he was also an example of the doubter. When he went into Egypt, he doubted that God would defend him all the way. Afraid that the Egyptians might kill him to get his beautiful wife, he took matters into his own hands and passed Sarah off as his sister.²

Later on, both Abraham and Sarah doubted that God could give them a son in their old age, though God had promised. So they took matters into their own hands and caused Ishmael to be born of Hagar.³ Human and religious doubt are nothing new, nothing unique — even among the “faithful.”

Doubt Is Dangerous

In speaking about doubt in this way, we do not want to play it down as if it doesn’t really matter after all, and as if there was nothing wrong with it.

In our time people are encouraged to doubt so much that it is really rather fashionable to say: *“Oh, I have such doubts! How can I be sure? It’s so hard to be a real Christian in this modern world!”*

Actually, there never was a time when Christianity was easy. It is probably easier in our age than it has been in most. Now, although doubt can be a healthy thing, it is never a safe place to stay for long, since — as in the beginning — it leads directly to disbelief and disobedience.

Doubt makes some people go looking for religious proofs where God supplies none. And when the proof cannot be found, doubt causes some to throw up their hands and their faith in despair.

Because of this the Bible never portrays doubt as a virtue, a good thing to have. When we pray, *“Lead us not into temptation,”* Luther notes in the catechism, that we are praying that we may be spared from *“false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins.”*

2. The Blessedness of Lively Trust

The real blessedness, then, as our text shows, lies not in doubting, but in a trusting and lively faith, in a belief that is strong even when the proof (as we might demand it) is lacking.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” With these words our Lord calls you and me from the problems of doubt to the blessedness of trust in Him.

Examples of Blessedness

Job is an example of this kind of trusting. We all know the story of Job: how his family, friends, and possessions were all taken from him; how he had every human reason to doubt, to curse God (as his wife continued to suggest), and then to die.

Yet through all the misery and trial Job speaks confidence for God’s hand in His dealings with man. He expressed this confidence as written in Job 19:25–27, ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;* ²⁶ *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

Indeed, doubting Thomas goes on to be a worker with a lively trust. Because Jesus showed Himself, as the doubter demanded, wavering Thomas became unshakeable Thomas.

Tradition has it that the mission churches founded by Thomas reached all the way to India and China as he went forth in lively faith and proclaimed the now undoubtable Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as God’s call to man to come to life with Him.

Likewise Augustine is talking about the leap of faith when he says, “*Let us doubt without disbelief the things to be believed.*” Or perhaps it is best said in the words of our Lord: ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***

Trust Nourished Through Word and Sacrament

Yet this doesn’t mean that God simply leaves us hanging to work out our own confidence by trial and error the best we can. Though Jesus does not appear to us suddenly and behind locked doors as He did to Thomas, He does come to us in the full assurance of His truth in other ways — in the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments.

John knew the power of God to work through the printed page of His Word when he wrote at the end of our text: ³⁰ ***And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*** The Bible is the Book of Life because it leads us to deeper faith and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ for us.

Likewise through the Sacraments our Lord calls us into life with God. Our baptism is the rite of commitment to Jesus Christ. Here we come, knocking at the door to life with God. And because of the life and death and life again of Jesus Christ, God opens those doors to us and calls us His children by this washing of rebirth and the renewing power of His Holy Spirit.

It is by this baptism too that we are brought into the holy Christian church, the fellowship of one another. Our life of faith is not a private matter between us and God alone. It is a life in connection and communion with the hundreds and thousands and millions of fellow believers. It is in this community and the life it has with God that we are built up and reassured in our individual lives with God.

We said our Lord does not normally appear to us in His body as He did to Thomas. Yet in Holy Communion He comes very near to doing just that. To be sure, the elements are simply bread and wine that look and taste just as bread and wine are supposed to.

But in, with, and under these elements our Lord offers Himself to us for the forgiveness of sins and for the strengthening, the reassuring, of our all-too-wavering faith. ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***

If life is a road we all must travel, then this sacrament is God's fuel for our journey, our Lord's way of continually offering His life as the power for our lives.

These gifts, Word and Sacrament, are to lead us to the blessing of a lively trust and a trusting life in the family of God that we might bring forth the results of the resurrection in our daily world so that we always hold fast our confidence in our resurrected Lord.

May the blessing of a faith that believes Christ without seeing be ours in this life that we may rejoice even more greatly when we see Him face to face in the life to come. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 11:16

² Gen 20:2

³ Gen 16:2