

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *My Lord and My God*

### Sermon Reflection Notes

The Sunday after Easter is the Sunday we hear the story of Thomas, the incredulous disciple who refused to believe in the resurrection until he had touched the wounds and scars of Jesus' body. He's often called 'Doubting Thomas' as if a bit of skepticism is a bad thing, but he wasn't alone in his unbelief. In Luke, when the women told the disciples what they encountered, the scripture says: "These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." In John's gospel, Mary Magdalene thinks the risen Jesus is the gardener. And Peter and the Beloved Disciple ran to the tomb because they had to see for themselves, and even then they left the empty tomb with doubt. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples walked and talked with Jesus for miles and still failed to recognize who he was until Jesus broke the bread. Even during the Great Commission, standing on the mountain with the resurrected Jesus in front of them, Matthew writes: "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." The disciples had firsthand accounts, and Thomas just hadn't had his turn yet.

In today's scripture, the disciples fear what is going to happen to them. They lock themselves away in a room, and the resurrected Jesus mysteriously walks in. Jesus says to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And then Jesus breathes on them, just as God breathed life into the dust in Genesis, saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The whole thing seems unlikely. It's not the way the world works; dead men, beaten and bludgeoned to death, don't come back to life and walk through locked doors. Even a world predating modern scientific methods knew that just didn't happen. Dead people stay dead. Except when they don't.

There's a connection between science and religion and Jesus and Thomas can teach us quite a bit. When asked the question, "Is science the enemy or the friend of religion?" David Wilkinson (English astrophysicist and ordained Methodist pastor) replied that science and religion are friends—but science is a friend that asks a lot of questions. Science asks good questions of the faith, which is a good thing, not a scary thing. That is science's best trait. The hope is that faith is asking good questions of science too. Scientific advancement can happen fast, but wisdom and virtue take time. Faith allows us to slow down and ask discerning questions like "Is this advancement wise or good?"

Thomas had questions, yet, but his questions get at the heart of what it means to be human. He's seeking contact with life; embodiment, tactile, textured life that created a real, meaningful encounter with the mysterious, the wondrous, the awesome.

On Confirmation Sunday, we also celebrate the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who have spent time asking good questions of their faith. Confirmation is a journey of discernment: discerning if baptismal vows (many made on their behalf) are something they can promise to uphold on their own; discerning if they can put their trust in Jesus; discerning their ability to resist injustice and oppression; discerning what it means to be faithful to the church which is open to all people. We don't merely define belief as intellectual assent to a Christian doctrine—what we most hope is that Confirmands have explored what it means to believe *in* God, to trust in God, to have hope in God. To believe.

The simplest question can be the most important one ever asked: What do you believe? Part of the answer may lie in discovering that faith and science are friends that ask questions of each other. It is okay to seek data, to need evidence. But awe and beauty and wonder have equal weight when we encounter the vast, mysterious realities that challenge our understanding of the world and foster a sense of connection to something larger than the self. Thomas touched Jesus' wounds and believed, saying: "My Lord and My God." Are those the words we say when we have evidence—or when we encounter the beauty, power, and awe of Christ's resurrection?

Blessed are those who believe and have not seen. We cannot touch the physical, resurrected body of Christ any longer, but there is still a way to encounter the living God. The wonder and awe of Christ's resurrection can be known through the way humanity loves one another. Doubt and faith can coexist. Science and religion are friends. The God who created the heavens transcends the moon and the cosmos out of love for you and for me. For all those yearning for a real, meaningful encounter with the living God—those who have doubts and good questions—may we find the evidence and awe and beauty we seek in the love of God and neighbor, from the moon or from the pew in front of us.

## Scripture

*John 20:19-31*

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Ron heard an interview this week about David Wilkinson being asked the question “Is science the enemy or the friend of religion?” His answer was that they are friends, but science is the friend who asks a lot of questions.
  - a. What are questions that science asks of faith?
  - b. What are questions faith asks of science?
2. Wilkinson also said in his reply that science asking questions of faith is a good thing, not a scary thing. Would you agree? Why might some be fearful of asking too many questions of faith?
3. Pastor Ron suggested that Thomas was saying something that is at the heart of what it means to be human: tactile, texturized contact with life, embodiment of life with something to point to. How would you describe the heart of what it means to be human? Do you agree with Pastor Ron’s assessment? Why/why not?
4. What does it mean that confirmation is a journey of discernment? How does our Methodist phrase “going on to perfection” relate to the discernment of confirmation?
5. Belief can be defined as ‘intellectual assent to a Christian doctrine’ but that would miss much of the theological understanding of belief or faith. What is belief? What does it mean to believe *in* God, to trust in God, to have hope in God?
6. What are moments of mystery and awe that cannot be explained with data and yet are irrefutable proof of faith and love and God? (*Think about the clip from the moon we heard in the sermon.*)

## Closing Prayer

Holy God, we are your sons and daughters. We are filled with the mysterious wonder of what it means to be your children, your friend, your family. But we are all too often filled with doubt and questions that frighten us and make us stammer for words to say. And yet, it is the mystery, wonder and awe that keep us close to each other and to you. Help us, this day, to stay with the mystery, to keep asking questions, to go on with our doubting—because we know that it will be in that space of beauty that we will discover you, that we will discover each other, that we will discover love. We pray all this through the One who walked with us through the mystery and who is raised to walk with us today, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

*“Science and faith are friends that ask good questions.”*