

Believe in Me



I know that Easter Sunday feels like it was a lifetime ago, but did you

know that in the life of the Church universal, Easter is more than just one day; it's an entire season that lasts all the way until the day of Pentecost. It's my hope that during this season, we focus on the Risen Christ and discover ways to live in the light of the Resurrection. Because, Friends, the resurrection is a daily reality, and we live as those marked by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So we talked on that first Sunday after Easter about the funk that we can find ourselves in and awoke to the reality that there's no such thing as a Zombie Jesus and no such thing as Zombie disciples. And last week, we talked about aloha and how Jesus wants everyone to feel that aloha welcome feeling.



Today, we're going to start a three-week message series on the post-

resurrection times that Jesus spent with disciples in the Gospel of John. After the resurrection, especially in John's gospel, Jesus spends a great amount of time with the disciples afterwards trying to teach the disciples how to live as his followers. And we may find ourselves on this side of Easter in the same position of the disciples. We know that Jesus lived. We know that Jesus made these important and insightful statements from the cross. We know that Jesus died. We know that Jesus rose to new life. But now we may find ourselves asking, "What does it mean to live as a follower of Christ?" And specifically, today, we find ourselves asking, "What does it mean to believe in Jesus?"



So, we start answering that question by looking at Thomas the Disciple

who for a time didn't believe in Jesus, or at least didn't believe that Jesus had risen, as Jesus said he would. In the days following the Resurrection, out of fear of their own prosecution and demise, John's gospel tells us that the disciples huddled

together in a house with the doors locked, but those locked doors couldn't hold out the Risen Jesus. Jesus appeared to them, blessing them with his peace.

How welcome would that peace have felt? The disciples had just been through so much, endured so much, and even though Jesus had risen, they didn't know that, and it still didn't feel like the hard times were over. They were afraid; they were confused. They were hopeless. And there's not a lot of peace when that many other emotions are swirling around. Then all of a sudden, Jesus is there. And Jesus doesn't greet them with words of judgment for their actions over the past few few days or anger that he'd died. No, Jesus greets them with words of peace and with proof that he is who they believe him to be: he shows them the wounds, the marks of crucifixion. And all of a sudden, the peace that Jesus proclaimed is present in the room. The peace that Jesus proclaimed is palpable and attainable. Everything still isn't okay; the disciples were still going to face hard times. But they now believe and know that Jesus is risen.



But Thomas missed this. He was not there. The disciples tell him all

that's happened, but Thomas doesn't believe. And so we call him "Doubting" Thomas. And we immortalize this moment by calling *anyone* who doubts *anything* a "Doubting Thomas." And I'd like, if I may, to rise in defense of Thomas.

Thomas is often given a bad rep for not believing what the other disciples had told him. However, it is perfectly reasonable to not believe that a dead man has risen from the dead. And he's been given no other evidence that what happened is true other than the word of the disciples. And in the midst of the anxiety of the days following the crucifixion, trusting and believing, even the words of beloved friends who had no reason to lie or mislead, felt like a risk; too much of a risk for Thomas.

But that's not the end of the story. Eight days later, the disciples are still in this locked room. Even though the other ten had seen Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, they're still not ready to leave the room. Jesus enters the room again. Jesus again proclaims peace over his beloved disciples. But the difference is that Thomas is in the room this time.

And just as he did before, Jesus isn't mad or disappointed. Jesus didn't hold Thomas' doubt against him. Instead Jesus gave Thomas what he needed so he could believe. Jesus also spoke to Thomas in a way that did not focus on his doubt, but that was meant to move Thomas to belief. And Thomas believed.



What I find most interesting in this story is Thomas' reaction. Jesus gives

him the permission he needs to believe. Thomas said that he needed to touch the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. Jesus invited Thomas to do what he needed to do in order to believe. But Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God!" But did you notice that that's his only reaction? Did Thomas actually need to touch Jesus in order to believe? What I know about the Gospel of John is that every detail is painstakingly mentioned. We know that it was night when Nicodemus came to learn from Jesus; we know that it was noon when Jesus laid down beside the well with the Samaritan woman. We know that Lazarus had been dead for four days. So, not having the detail that Thomas touched Jesus would be an uncharacteristic oversight, which leads me to believe that Thomas never actually needed to touch Jesus' wounds in order to believe. He simply made his confession: You, Jesus, are my Lord; you, Jesus are my God.

Even though Thomas didn't even need it, Jesus offered. Jesus knew what Thomas needed—or even thought he needed—and showed up for him. Jesus met him where he was and guided him to belief.



Do you remember when you came to believe? Was it big and dramatic

like Thomas here or was it quieter and more reserved like the other disciples? And what was it that “tipped the balance” for you? I know in my own life of faith what tipped the balance for me was a camp counselor and a dear friend. I was at a church camp and experienced a welcome and acceptance that I'd never experienced before. I had a strong faith background and a wonderful church family that supported me on going to camp. But then came that night in the chapel. We talked about the love of Jesus and grace and then a man at the front of the church said, “If you want to accept Christ, you can come pray with one of your counselors.” And I did. And it has made all the difference. I had some much background that it was just the next step. But Jesus knew I needed the conversations I had with a camp counselor and provided.

Maybe the better question is what do you need now, in this season after Easter, what do you need in order to believe? How can Jesus meet you and what can Jesus do that will bring you to a place of increased faith? Jesus remains willing to give us what we actually need in order to believe. That's Jesus' whole goal; that's John's whole goal. That's my whole goal. Jesus wants you to believe and will do anything he can to guide you there, whether it's peace and comfort or a swift kick to the butt. No matter what it is. May you find it; may we help you along the way. And may we all come to confess with Thomas: My Lord and My God.