

## **Doubt**

### **People of the Resurrection # 3**

#### **Matthew 28:16-20**

Good Morning Church Family,

I hope you're doing well this morning. When we had to cancel our trip to Minnesota at the end of April thanks to the Forever Winter, I asked the Worship and Advisory Committee if I could submit a video sermon for this week, so that I could go visit my family. They graciously agreed. So, as you're watching this, I'm probably somewhere on the Transcanada highway, sipping a coffee and handing snacks to my kids in the back seat. I'm looking forward to seeing you all next week.

For my message this morning, we're going to continue digging into the question of what it means to be People of the Resurrection. How does the reality that Jesus rose from the dead change how we live our waking, working and walking lives? What are the hallmarks of Resurrection People?

Let's take a look at our scripture for this morning. For a bit of context, in the book of Matthew, this passage about the commissioning of the disciples comes almost immediately after the women find Jesus' tomb empty. We know from the other Gospel writers that Jesus appeared to many people. Sources say that Jesus continued his

ministry for 40 more days after the resurrection, and then he ascended into heaven.

Matthew doesn't mention the accession in today's scripture, but that's likely what was taking place, as the story is very similar to the ascension account in Mark's Gospel. So, by the time this commissioning is taking place, the disciples have had 40 days with the Risen Jesus- sharing meals, talking, and doing ministry with him.

Jesus directs the disciples to meet him at the mountain. They show up, see Jesus again and "they worship him; but some doubted." They worship him; but some doubted." This is the sentence that I really want us to hone in on for this morning. These are the 11 disciples, some of whom saw the empty tomb, all of whom had seen the nail scarred hands and feet of Jesus, all who had seen the wound in his side, and still some doubted. To me in this room over 2,000 years later, this feels somewhat incredible. If there was ANYONE in the history of Christianity that should have a rock solid belief in Jesus and the resurrection, surely it should be his disciples, right?

If we just turn back to the section of verses before the story of the commissioning, this is what we find in Matthew 28:11-15. The verses come right after Matthew's account of the woman and disciples discovering the Risen Jesus and the empty tomb, so immediately after that story, this is what Matthew says, " While they were going, some of the guards went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests[c] had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this comes to the governor's ears, we will

satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.”

Is this the reason some of the disciples doubted Jesus on the mountain that day?

Possibly. It was Peter and John at the tomb, could they be trusted? What about the women -had they made some special arrangement? Had they really seen Jesus die...was this all a fever dream? Had the disciples been approached on the street by people and told, “For real, you don’t expect us to believe that his man came back from the dead do you? We’re not fools. C’mon fess up, what really happened at that tomb?”

There are a million reasons that doubts about many things, faith included, enter into our lives. A tragedy. A wounding at the hands of the church. Those questions that simply won’t quiet. And the disciples were no different from us. “They worshiped him, but some doubted.”

Now the text doesn’t tell us who doubted, nor does Jesus call out those men from the group. Listen, you, and you, there’s no room for doubts or misgivings. Head on home while I chat with my true, faith disciples. No! Knowing that there were some serious doubts within this group, what Jesus says in verses 18:20, “ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus commanded them ALL to go, every one of them, making disciples in all nations, baptizing and

teaching. Basically, Jesus is handing over the ministry of the building the new Kingdom to them-ALL of them.

Part of the rub here is that, traditionally, the church has not done well with the topic of doubt. Doubting has long been viewed as sin, a moral failure, or at the very least a hindrance to following Jesus. When I think of Jesus' disciple Thomas, my brain automatically fills in "Doubting". He's "Doubting Thomas" -never just Thomas. I've heard sermons on how we shouldn't be "like Doubting Thomas", perhaps some of you have too.

I remember once, in high school, my youth group was having a discussion about evangelism-telling more people about salvation through Jesus. This was a hot topic for Evangelical Youth Groups in the early 2000s. My youth pastor at the time, whose name was Chris, said, "How many of you, by a show of hands, know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you'll see Jesus in heaven when you die?" Hands lifted around that little room, mine included. All except one-my friend Leah. The Pastor's daughter. She giggled uncomfortably. Chris turned to her and said, not unkindly, "All this (evangelism) becomes so much easier if you're sure." And Leah, brave, courageous Leah, said, "I do believe, but, you know, what if there's a chance I'm wrong? What if something else is true?" Looking back on that moment, goodness, I admire Leah, who was brave enough to give voice to doubt. Brave enough to say, I'm here, I'm in this, I believe, but what if I'm wrong?" Who among us hasn't felt that what if at some point, about something?

It turns out, Leah, is in good company, and anyone who has ever been courageous enough to express their doubts. In the Gospel of Mark, Chapter nine, a father comes to see Jesus. He says his son has been possessed by a demon since he was a little boy and desperately needs help. Starting in verse 20, “So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. “How long has this been happening?” Jesus asked the boy’s father. He replied, “Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.” “What do you mean, ‘If I can’?” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.” The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil [f] spirit. “Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak,” he said. “I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!” Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.”

“I do believe, but help my unbelief!” I find this to be such an honest prayer. I’m here, Jesus, because I believe in you, I need your help, I believe you can do it...but...but..help me! Fill in the gaps, Jesus. I’m only human; help my unbelief, help my doubts.

Stories like this one, along with the mention of the disciples' doubt in our passage for

this morning, does seem to indicate that faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive states of being. Not a higher plane of consciousness to try to obtain. Rather, faith and doubt can and do exist side by side for Jesus' followers. And while we may see faith and doubt as uncomfortable bedfellows; awkward roommates, I don't think Jesus sees it that way.

Returning back to our passage for this morning, "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Again, let's remember that he said this to ALL of the disciples, not the select few who passed the "enough faith" or "doubt free" test, and notice Jesus says at the end, "And remember that I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus' assurance here to us is not if you doubt: try harder! Believe more! Get together! No, his assurance is, and "I am with you. Always. To the end of the age. I am with you in doubt. I am the I am and that promise, Jesus says, is enough for us to obey his call to us. Enough to welcome doubt as part of faith.

Normalize doubt-but realize that doubt is not a reason to forsake our calling, at least not in the mind of Jesus.

So, how do we walk this out? We may not be ready to welcome doubt as a friend, but perhaps we can get a little closer to naming it, to acknowledging it's presence in the room.

First, we can remember that if Jesus isn't afraid of our doubts, then we need not be either. There's the temptation to wrap duct tape around the voice of doubt, to sing the songs of faith a little louder, to stay busy in hopes of drowning out the questions, but sooner or later doubt is going to bubble to the surface. And that's okay. Jesus seems untroubled by the disciples' doubts, so maybe we can try to trouble ourselves a bit less about doubt too.

Secondly, we can be assured that Jesus' call on our lives doesn't change because we doubt. Jesus offered his commission to the disciples and told them to run with it. Even if you doubt. Even if you're not sure, I'm telling you to go and make disciples. Here are the keys to the New Kingdom- I trust you. When I was in college, I attended a workshop called "How to Lose Your Faith in College". It was tongue in cheek to be sure, but there are statistics and anecdotes to back up the reality that many students who attend a Christian College walk away from faith all together. The best advice that I remember from that session was "Don't stop going to church." When you're in a season of doubt or deconstruction, the worst thing that you can do, is to cut yourself off from church.

Because it cuts you off from the bigger story, from people outside yourself and from the gift of community.” Doubt doesn’t give us a free pass to let go of our calling; rather it’s an invitation to stick with it and to seek God’s face in it. Rachel Held Evans, who wrote prolifically on the topic of doubt and deconstruction wrote, “ Faith isn’t about having everything figured out ahead of time; faith is about following the quiet voice of God without having everything figured out ahead of time.”

Thirdly, and finally, we can hold on to Jesus’ anchoring promise that He is with us, always, even to the very end of the age. Throughout the Bible, the Old Testament especially, when we see a person faced with a difficult task, like Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery, or Joshua entering Jericho to claim the promised land, God’s assurance is often “Don’t be afraid-I am with you.” Again and again, God has shown his people that his presence is enough, so we can lean into that invitation- into that truth.

In closing, People of the Resurrection, may we know that doubt is part and parcel of the Christian Story, part and parcel of our own faith. May we learn to walk towards Jesus, fulfilling the mission he gave to us, resting in the promise that he is with us-doubts and all. Amen.