

“Whom Do You Trust”

JOHN 20:19-31, EASTER 2-A, APRIL 23, 2017

Thinking back to your 6th grade English Grammar class, you probably remember that a “synonym” is the word we use to describe two words that are two different words but whose meaning is very much the same. A “antonym” is a word that is the opposite of another word! If big is the antonym for small and sweet is the antonym for sour and “stuck-up” is the antonym for friendly—then CERTAINTY is the antonym for DOUBT.

Have you ever stopped to think that “certainty” is sometimes a very different goal to achieve in one’s life? And yet the Bible teaches us that those who live in a right relationship with the LORD God Almighty may possess a greater sense of certainty as they make their way throughout life.

Job, for all of his troubles and tribulations, his personal pain, loss, grief and sadness could still say: “I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last shall stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold and not another! My heart faints within me” (**Job 19:25-27**)!

Proverbs 3:6, “Seek the Lord in all your ways and he will make straight your path!”

Romans 12:1-2, “Present yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, then you will be able to discern and know what the will of the Lord is for you!”

Paul told Timothy, “I know on whom I have believed and I am certain that he is able to guard that which I have entrusted to him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

POSSESSING CERTAINTY IN LIFE IS SOMETIMES A VERY DIFFICULT GOAL TO ARRIVE AT OR ACHIEVE!

Stop and think about it! Life is full of decisions. **Should, I play sports in high school, or not? Should, I go to college, or not? Should, I marry this man, or should I marry this woman, or not? Should I purchase a house or live in an apartment while I save up a bigger down payment? Sometimes people are very certain about the decisions they make but there are sometimes when people are faced with doubts too!**

In the minds of some people our Gospel lesson today (John 20:19-31) is about the most famous doubter in the world!

You already know his name! That’s right...people often refer to him as “DOUBTING THOMAS” though the Bible does not!

The news of Jesus’ resurrection spread quickly among his disciples. You can imagine the quickened pulse, the rapid heartbeat and the excited speech of those who had encountered the risen Christ as they then shared their experience with others. You can also imagine the difficulty that those people, who heard their story, had in believing it.

The first recipients of the good news of our Savior’s resurrection were the women who make their way down to Jesus’ tomb bright and early that first Easter morning! They were not going there with flowers and candy to greet a risen Lord! No, they were going down there with oil and spices, they believed, with which they would then anoint Jesus’ lifeless body! **BUT**

SURPRISE OF ALL SURPRISES! Not only was the stone rolled away, an angel then spoke that good news to these women: “You are seeking Jesus who was crucified! He is not here! He has risen as he said!”

When the women folk told the men folk the good news, St. Luke tells us that they regarded these words of the women as “an idle tale” and nothing more and that they did not believe the women’s story was true (Luke 24:11)!

None of those 10 remaining disciples **DECIDED TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS WAS ACTUALLY RAISED FROM THE DEAD. NONE OF THEM MADE A DECISION FOR CHRIST AT THAT POINT. IT WAS THE RISEN CHRIST THAT APPEARED TO THEM IN THE UPPER ROOM LATER THAT FIRST EASTER EVENING. HIS FIRST WORDS TO THEM AGAIN WERE WORDS OF PEACE!**

“Peace be with you!” Immediately after this he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were **GLAD** when they saw the Lord?

Jesus said to them again: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you!” **And when he had said this**, he breathed on them and said to them: *“Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven! If you withhold forgiveness from anyone it is withheld!”*

Unfortunately Thomas wasn’t there that first Easter evening in the Upper Room locked behind doors for fear of the religious authorities, as the other disciples were. They were fearful that what the religious authorities did to Jesus they could easily choose to do to them next!

Because **THOMAS** wasn’t there that night he is often remembered as the most famous “holdout;” Thomas, also called the Twin because he must have had a twin brother. He said: *“Unless I see the print of the nails in his hands,” said Thomas, “and place my fingers in the print of the nails, and unless I can put my hand in his side, I will not believe!”*

II. Why was Thomas absent when Jesus appeared to the other 10 disciples that first Easter evening?

(A) We are not sure why Thomas was absent. It seems **unlikely that he had gone back to his job at the time!** The other disciples had not gone back to their respective vocations of fishing or any other kind of vocation that may have been theirs before Jesus called them to become his disciples!

(B) Maybe Thomas was just like some others today when they experience a tough blow in life or encounter some form of tragedy—difficulty—or sorrow? They withdraw from the fellowship and isolate themselves from their church community.

III. Why couldn’t Thomas accept the words of his fellow disciples as being true? Maybe it was simply because Thomas was the same way back then way that so many people still are in our world today—they find it extremely difficult to take to heart—and to believe the words of others and to trust that what others are telling them.

Thomas had certainly experienced in the week just prior to this that the words of his fellow disciples were not always reliable. When Jesus tried to warn the disciples that they would soon desert him and even deny him before others, they professed out loud that nothing in this world would ever, or could ever, dampen their enthusiasm towards Jesus or weaken their commitment to him!

Shortly after Jesus and his disciples had left the Upper Room where he celebrated the Passover with them for the last time and where he had instituted the Blessed Sacrament of Holy

Communion—they sang a hymn, Matthew tells us, and then they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, *“You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matthew 26:30-31)! This is when Peter answered Jesus, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away!” And Jesus does his best to further caution this impetuous fisherman: “Truly, I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times!”*

Peter said to him, *“Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same” (Matthew 26:33-35)! **Here was just one case in point—Thomas remembered—that words of his fellow disciples could not be trusted!***

III. So how was Thomas skepticism changed to a profound statement of adoration? Though Thomas had said, *“Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the marks of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (v. 25).....**ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT WE SHOULD REALIZE HERE IS THAT JESUS NEVER CONDEMNED THOMAS BECAUSE OF HIS DOUBTS.***

Nor do we have any indication, whatsoever, that Thomas’ fellow disciples were excoriating him because of the doubts they were expressing, for just one week before this they had found themselves in their same posture of doubting and uncertainty...that Thomas was now finding himself in here.

Just as there is a big difference between the temptation to sin and actually sinning, there is also a big difference between doubting and losing your faith altogether. Do you remember what happened when Jesus, Peter, James and John descended the Mount of Transfiguration? There was a man down there with his son---whose father understood him to be demon possessed --- though there may have been those cases where a boy like this was suffering from epilepsy with seizures. The other disciples had attempted to bring healing to this boy, but they were not able. Jesus turned to that man and asked him: “Do you believe I can do this for you?” --- “Yes,” the man replied. “Lord, I believe but please help me with my unbelief!”

And don’t we live in a world that is **JUST CHOCKED FULL OF ALL SORTS OF MISTRUST TODAY?** There is no shortage of examples of increasing mistrust in our modern society? People question the reliability of answers given to the citizens of our nation by those charged with the responsibility of government on the federal, state and local levels! People have been accused of tapping other peoples’ phones and tampering with election results—with no solid evidence. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult to know who can be trusted. Doubt, mistrust and skepticism abound everywhere!

It’s been over a week now since--what has been labeled by some people—**THE UNITED AIRLINES PASSENGER REMOVAL FIASCO** took place. USA TODAY reported that **“the CEO of United Airlines apologized again Tuesday amid a global uproar sparked when a Chinese passenger was dragged screaming from his seat on a flight that, it turns out, wasn’t even overbooked!”**

Fortunately, for Thomas, the Risen Christ returned to that same house a week later, repeating the words and actions he offered to the other disciples on the night when he first appeared. It was another miracle, a sign, as Jesus again entered a locked room to pay a visit to his friends.

When Jesus stood in their midst, he repeated to Thomas almost the very words that Thomas had asked for proof. But there is no evidence that Thomas actually touched Jesus. He stopped

short of what he said he would require. He fell down at Jesus' feet and cried, "*My Lord and my God!*" Jesus' appearance in the Upper Room took place to satisfy the questioning spirit of Thomas. The one who had been the worst skeptic made the most profound confession of faith recorded in the Gospels: "*My Lord and my God!*" This was a remarkable confession for a Jewish man! But this confession is what the whole Gospel of John has been moving towards. In the prologue to the Gospel, John wrote: "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*" (John 1:1).

The German theologian Helmut Thielicke put it this way, "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith; they keep faith alive and moving." Doubt is one of God's most effective tools for producing mighty men and women of faith.

I worry about someone who says to me, "I have never doubted for one moment my faith in God." My friend, is that person alive? Does that person have a brain? Does that person ever use it?

The whole concept of "doubting" is closely related to that whole subject of "testing;" of God's testing our faith to make it stronger!

Let me use an analogy from the world of commercial fishing. Years ago seafood companies had a perplexing problem with the shipment of codfish to consumers who lived inland. Shippers discovered that frozen codfish loses its flavor in the shipping process. Shipping live codfish is no better. In the holding tanks they become soft and mushy and later tasteless. -- So somebody came up with the idea of throwing in some catfish into each of the tanks of live cod. Catfish and codfish are natural enemies. In a quest for survival, the codfish are kept in constant motion as they seek to escape the catfish. Thereby these cod are kept in peak condition from the ocean to your dinner table.

In a sense, doubt and frustration and other such obstacles may serve in our lives as the catfish that God has placed in our tank to keep us swimming, to keep us at our best. There is far more hope for the honest doubter than for the person who says, "Of course, I believe," and never really struggles with the meaning and the misery of life.

It seems clear to me that God intends for us to struggle with the great questions of life. It may be that such a struggle is essential to a strong, mature faith. Never to have doubted is never to have taken the walk of faith seriously.

SO LET ME ASK YOU: WHOM DO YOU TRUST? THE BIBLE TEACHES US THAT WE CAN ALWAYS TRUST THAT WHAT GOD IS TELLING US IN HIS WORD IS TRUE!

But in the Gospel lesson this morning we also can see that God provides us with exactly what we need to overpower our doubts and to allow him to replace our doubts with true faith, love and trust in him.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31)!

And then our Lord Jesus concludes the whole thing by speaking another one of his great beatitudes like those beatitudes in his Sermon on the Mount. There he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled! Blessed are the meek for

they shall inherit the earth! Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted! Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called "the children of God!"

But here Jesus, knowing the power of God's Word and the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit who is always working through the proclamation of that word to call all people to faith in him also says: "*Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29)! *AMEN*