

APRIL 24, 2022-DOUBT

Our Gospel comes from John 20:19-31

So today, we're gonna talk all about doubt, which is something that plagues us all.

You know, several years ago, Webster Dictionary announced a new word, called it "the word of the year," and that word was post-truth.

It's an adjective, and it describes an environment in which facts become less important than personal belief, opinion, and emotion.

In other words, truth becomes whatever you decide it's gonna be, very much bringing to mind the conversation Pilate had with Jesus when Jesus said, "For this I was born. For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Those who belong to the truth hear My voice," and Pilate responded, "Truth, what is truth?"

And boy, that is the question, and in a world of post-truth, truth has been reduced to an opinion.

Now, I bring it up because our Gospel today, Thomas confronts truth, real truth.

Oh, yeah, Doubting Thomas.

That name Doubting has been hung around his neck for centuries, and I gotta say I think he got a bum rap because let's be honest, they all doubted. Just try to imagine what they were thinking, these disciples.

I mean, put yourself in their shoes.

Jesus has just been crucified in a most violent way, suffered, died, and was buried in a tomb.

Now, normally, as these things go, if one is crucified, they could last for days on the cross, writhing in pain before they die, but with Jesus, it was a little different because He was crucified on the eve of Passover, and they couldn't leave a body hanging on a cross on such a holy day, so they needed to expedite His death.

Now, getting back to crucifixion.

Generally, the way you would die when you were crucified is by asphyxiation.

You suffocate because you're nailed to a cross, the cross is lifted up in the air, and you are left to hold yourself up and out to breathe, but in time, you lose the strength to hold yourself up and out, and as your muscle's spasm in agony, eventually, you wear out with the weight of your own body, and you fall, and your lungs collapse, and you suffocate.

So often, what would happen, and I guess you could describe this as an act of mercy, the soldiers would come by and break the shinbones of the crucified to hurry up the process, but when they came to Jesus, well, He was already dead.

Meanwhile, the disciples, they're gone.

I mean, they have run, they have fled the scene.

They're hiding, and of course, they're afraid, and their fear is well-placed because they're accomplices to the crimes of Jesus, and they

thought that they might suffer the same fate, which, of course, we know in time that almost all of them did, but now, the body has come up missing, and who do you think are gonna be the prime suspects? Of course, them.

Keep in mind that breaking into a tomb is a capital offense according to Roman law.

So, like I said, they're afraid, and their fears are well-placed.

So here they are, hiding in the upper room.

All their hopes and dreams and desires have been smashed on that cross, and they had hooked their wagon to Jesus.

They had followed Him for almost three years. They were convinced that He was the Messiah. He was gonna restore Israel.

They had given up their homes.

They had left family.

They had left communities. They had left jobs.

They had left everything, and now, He's dead, and there is no plan B, so they're laying low for a time, waiting for the heat to die down.

I imagine they're gonna slip out of Jerusalem, the back door, to safety.

Now, they start getting these strange reports.

Starting with Mary of Magdala and some of the women, they're claiming that they saw Jesus alive!

Then two of their own disciples, or fellow disciples, they were slipping out the back door, making their way to their hometown of Emmaus, and they claim that Jesus showed up!

So, really?

I mean, dead people don't rise.

Peter and John had gone to the tomb, and they had seen that yeah, it was empty, but they didn't see Jesus, but His body was missing, so now, they're in a tight situation.

It's a conundrum.

It's a sticky wicket, and their circumstances are dire, and they are full of fear.

On the evening of the first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

We will see that phrase, "Peace be with you," three times in this Gospel.

Now, I just gotta say in passing, when Jesus says something, that's very important.

You need to remember that, but if He says it two times, well, that's really important.

Three times, that's super, super-important.

"Peace be with you," three times, but do we get it?

Not really.

We are a fearful people.

"Peace be with you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives it to you, but I give you peace. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid."

Boy, I tell you, if we could just get that one.

"When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side," why?
Well, evidence.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them, again, "Peace be with you."
Here's the evidence. Here's the truth, and what's the truth?
I want you to really open up your minds wide and hear this.
The truth is, I have defeated sin that has separated you from God.
That's the truth, so that's what I've done.
Here comes the mission. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," and when He said this, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
So, He breathes on them the breath of God.
It's the Holy Spirit.
He says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."
Now, well, what?

This is big.
What are you saying?
Are you saying that all of a sudden, these disciples have the power to forgive sins?
I mean, who can forgive sins but God alone?
I mean, really, can't only the one who's been offended by sin be the forgiver of sin?
I want you to really hear this, okay.

When Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained," can't you see it's the Holy Spirit in which they're now receiving that is doing the actual forgiving?
In the same way, when someone comes to confession with me as the priest, and I give them absolution, am I silly enough to think that I, Father Chapin, somehow am the source of their forgiveness?
Of course not, but the Holy Spirit, which, by the way, is Jesus and God the Father as well, remember Trinity, three in one.
The Holy Spirit, by the power of holy orders invested in me as a successor of the disciples who are in this room today, that's what does the forgiving.
You see how that works?
But honestly, the whole thing is a moot point 'cause nobody comes to confession anyway, but the bottom line is this: those who accept the message of salvation, their sins are forgiven.
Those who reject the message of salvation, their sins are retained.
But anyway, let's get back to Thomas.

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
So, my first question is well, where is Thomas?
Where did he go?
I mean, I don't know.
Scriptures don't tell us.
So, we don't know where he went, but I can tell you where he wasn't.
He wasn't hiding, right?
He wasn't hiding in the upper room.
So, what do we know about Thomas?
I mean, what do we really know about this man?
Not a whole lot, actually.
Well, we know a little bit.
We know that he's from Galilee.
We can assume that he knew Peter and John and was most likely a fisherman.
I mean, his two biggest appearances happened in the Gospel of John.
The first one is in the eleventh chapter, and reports were coming in that Lazarus, who was a friend of Jesus, was very sick.
Now, Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was a little suburb just outside of Jerusalem, and so when Jesus announces, "Hey, we're gonna go back to Bethany," they were, "Oh, no, that's not a good idea," 'cause they had just come from that area, and things had not gone well.
I mean, they had wanted to stone Jesus and the disciples to death, so this did not sound like a very good idea, and the disciples are making Jesus know this, but it is Thomas who speaks up, and what does he say?
"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."
Now, that says a lot about Thomas.
Instead of the doubting, we should call him Brave Thomas, 'cause he's not afraid.
Next time we hear about Thomas is in my favorite chapter of all the Bible, which is John 14, because after Jesus had just informed His disciples that He had to go, and they couldn't follow, but He was gonna prepare a place for them, and He said, "Where I am, you can't follow, but you know the way," they just all looked at each other like, "What?"
And nobody said anything.
It was just silent in that room, but who speaks up?
Thomas.
He breaks the silence with what he says.
He says, "Wait a minute, Jesus. We don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?"
Which of course, tees up one of the greatest lines in all of the Bible: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me," but once again, tells us a lot about Thomas.
When everybody else was silent, he wasn't afraid to speak up.
Once again, no fear. Brave Thomas.

He looks at Thomas the doubter.
He goes, "Come here. Come here. Get over here.
Put your fingers here and see my hands. Bring your
hand. Put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but
believe," and in that moment, the whole room just
disappeared.

It was just Thomas and Jesus eye to eye, one on
one.

My friends, Thomas had no right to make those
demands, but was Jesus angry?

No.

In His divine humility, rather than allowing Thomas
to continue in his unbelief, He lowers Himself level
to Thomas, eye to eye, lifts His tunic, and reveals
His wounds.

"If your faith is so weak you require a sign, fine, here
it is. Put your hand in My side."

Makes sense, for it was for his sake that He
suffered that spear to be thrust in His side to
begin with.

Thomas doubted, but like I said, many of us doubt.
I mean, we wanna believe, but how can we really
know? This is a very important question.

Jesus said, "Do not be unbelieving, but believe. Do
not be faithless, but have faith," and Thomas says,
"My Lord and my God."

Now, keep in mind, this Gospel is at the very end of
the Gospel of John.

"My Lord and my God," is the highest Christological
statement in all the Gospels, but can you see how
it's a bookend to how this same Gospel begins?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was
with God, and the Word was God, and then the
Word becomes flesh and dwells among us."

"My Lord and my God," can you see how that
works?

Then Jesus says, "Have you come to believe in Me
because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who
have not seen but have believed."

He's talking about us! How can we know? How can
we believe?

Like I said, and I've said this before, but I'll say it
again: the only way that we can know truth for sure
is when the

Now, just before the break, we were talking all
about Thomas, and well, I know we got hung up
with the doubting thing, but he really should be
Brave Thomas 'cause he's not afraid, and the first
time that Jesus appears to the upper room, or in the
upper room with the other disciples who are hiding,
Thomas was not with them.

Where did he go? We don't know.

And we're just talking here, but I'm thinking that
he's wandering the streets of Jerusalem with a
mean look in his eye, looking for who stole the body
of Jesus.

His life had flown apart.

Everything that he believed in evaporated on the
cross.

He might not have had a plan B, but he wasn't
hiding, and when he returned to his buddies, who
were all, like, "Oh, we've seen the Lord!"

You know, I mean, I can just see him sneer, "Do not
mock me. Dead people don't come back to life."

Then he lists three demands: "Unless I see the
marks of the nails in His hand, put my finger into the
nail marks, and put my hand into His side, I will not
believe."

Now, I think we all got a bit of Doubting Thomas in
us. We've all had our seasons of doubt.

Who knows, you might be going through that
season right now.

Watch this, okay?

Now, a week later, the disciples were again inside,
and Thomas was with them.

Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and
stood in their midst and said for a third time, "Peace
be with you." Then Jesus looks at Thomas, and I
often wonder, I wonder what Jesus was thinking
about now.

I mean, how much more evidence do you need, my
friend?

You had a front row seat to all those miracles, and
you want more?

I mean, I'm thinking He's thinking that.

He had every right to think that, but that's not what
He says.

Holy Spirit reveals it to us one on one, face to face,
eye to eye, just like Thomas in that room today.

The whole room disappears, and it's just you and
Jesus.

Ask the Holy Spirit to come into your heart today
and reveal Jesus to you, and rather than trying to
demand some new sign, why not consider the signs
He's already given you?

Read His Word. Read the Gospels.

Ask the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Teacher, to
illuminate the reality of Jesus to you.

Don't rely on somebody like me to try to explain it.
Faith comes from the reading of the Word.

You wanna know what Jesus is thinking?

Read His Word.

You wanna hear from Jesus? Read it out loud.

Understand, you will never understand everything
on your own.

No scholar, no professor is gonna discern these
words by their own power.

You gotta ask with a sincere heart for His Word to
be revealed to you, and He will because that's the
Holy Spirit's job.

That's what it does.

That's its mission, and when the storms of life blow,
as they do, as you cup your birthday candle of faith

in the wind and you doubt, just look to the wounds of Jesus.

Look to the wounds.

Is it just me, or does anybody else find it a bit odd that the resurrected body of Jesus would still have those wounds?

Why wouldn't perfection make those wounds disappear?

Let me tell you why, because those wounds are perfection.

Those five wounds are like five jewels, like precious gems that mark who Jesus is and what He has done for you.

Once upon a time, there was a monk who lived as a hermit.

He was known far and wide for his holiness and wisdom.

Lived in a cave.

Kings and noblemen would travel a great distance to seek his advice, but he rarely left his cave.

But then one day, a local church that was celebrating an anniversary asked if he would come and speak to the congregation about the love of God, and to the surprise of many, he accepted the invitation.

News quickly spread, and people from all over came to listen to the wise monk.

When the night came, the church was packed.

When the time came for the wise monk to speak, he asked that all the lights of the church be turned off, and it was a large congregation, and they were thrown into total darkness.

He then walked out into the sanctuary and stood in front of the vast crowd in silence.

After a long pause, he lit one candle.

He then had a stepladder placed in front of a large crucifix, and he climbed the ladder in silence with the candle, and without saying a word, he moved the candle to illuminate the wounds on His hands.

Then he moved the candle to illuminate the wound on His side.

Then he moved the candle down to illuminate the wounds on His feet.

Then he climbed down the ladder and stood in front of the crowd, continued in silence.

Then he blew the candle out and walked away because there was nothing more to be said.

He is risen. Alleluia, Alleluia.

-Rev. Katie Dailey, in process