

## Sermon for April 15, 2018 – “Trust”

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B, Text(s): John 20:19-31

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Every year we get Thomas. Every year, on the second or third Sunday of Easter we hear his story and it can be a little tiresome, especially as the preacher. It can be tiresome to think of something new to say about this skeptic and his disbelief. And maybe hearing about Thomas year after year is boring, hearing a message about believing despite evidence or about having faith in the witness of those telling you the story. Now, it may just be me but this year, the Thomas story seems different. This year, the **whole** story, the story of Jesus from beginning to end, feels different. Maybe it started last fall with the Las Vegas shooting and the shadow it cast over Advent and Christmas. Maybe it was the shooting at the Parkland Florida school. Maybe, it’s about the cumulative effect of all the shootings and violence we hear about non-stop or the opioid epidemic. Maybe it’s all of the sexual misconduct allegations with which we’ve been bombarded lately, the demonstrations and marches taking place, et cetera, et cetera. The Thomas story seems different because it feels harder to care about the evidence the way Thomas seems to. We’re used to doubting everything these days including the evidence.

My question is this...When did we become so cynical? Remember when things seemed simpler? When did things get so complex? When did things turn so dark? Was it before 9/11? Was it before Columbine? Ironically, after Columbine, which took place on April 20, 1999, it was hard to imagine things getting much worse. At the time, the shooting at a Colorado high school was the deadliest school attack in US history. But then came Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook. With thirteen victims’ dead it was also one of the deadliest shootings overall. But then came San Bernardino, Orlando, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs and Parkland. In the nearly 20 years since Columbine rocked us to our core we’ve seen so many more mass shootings that the attack isn’t even among the 10 deadliest mass shootings in modern US history. Three of the five deadliest shootings have occurred in just the last year and a half. But, there was time when things were simpler. A time when only a handful of people had mobile phones, a time when the internet was only for computer nerds. Back then the world was relaxed enough, and people had enough time to question whether or not Jesus even existed, Thomas’ question seemed like a legitimate challenge to faith and the church, and it was. But not so these days. It’s hard these days to worry about such frivolous objections to Christianity when much bigger ones are out there, like politicians who use faith for political gain along with racism and sexism, and the Church seems to be struggling for survival. I mean, don’t we just seem to take Jesus for granted? He’s risen...we get that. What else ya got? So, it’s hard to make the energy to be invested in Thomas’ desire for evidence for evidence that the risen Christ was actually risen. Or at least, it’s hard to make the energy for this story in the way that we’ve become used to telling it. But, as usual, just because we’re used to a story being told one way doesn’t mean we have it right.

So, on this third Sunday of Easter, we’re transported back to the first Easter evening. Earlier that morning, the women had gone and reported that the tomb was empty. The disciples didn’t believe the reports because back then, no one believed what women had to say. And instead they’re hiding away. We just heard that “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.”

They're hiding behind locked doors because they're frightened of the authorities, those in power. They're hiding because those same authorities, the temple priests, King Herod, maybe even Pontius Pilate, you know – the ones that killed Jesus, those authorities might be coming for them next. And then Jesus appears among them! He offers them His peace. He breathes on them the Holy Spirit, then goes His merry way. But Thomas misses the whole thing. And when he does re-join the others he doesn't believe a word of their story. He wants to see Jesus himself. He wants to touch His hands and side. Thomas seems to want evidence...or so we think. I mean, that is what we've always believed and have always been taught right? What am I talking about? Well, when you think about it, the world in which Thomas lives is less like the world of twenty years ago and more like our world today. We used to have trust for those in power and authority. We used to feel safe and protected. We used to trust that politicians had our best interests at heart, that our employers wanted to see us succeed, that our neighbors were trustworthy, that churches were places that proclaimed truth. For Thomas, the powers and authorities of his world were dangerous. The governors and rulers were not only untrustworthy, but likely wouldn't hesitate to kill anyone they found inconvenient. The market places were full of cheaters and work was scarce. People living under oppression wouldn't hesitate to try to get in good with the local authorities by betraying this silly band of Jesus followers. You may recall that one of their own (Judas) actually did! Someone they'd trusted so much so that they let him hold their money had gone and betrayed Jesus to the religious rulers for thirty pieces of silver...the equivalent of four months wages! How do any of them know that one of the others won't try to do the same? So, like Thomas, we feel less and less sure of our political leaders. I think it says something about our country when we no longer choose between the better of two candidates but between the lesser of two evils. We know employers are trying to maximize profit which usually means cutting costs (usually workers) as well as cutting corners. We don't trust our neighbors because they're too different. They talk differently than we do. They worship in different ways. They don't seem to have the same values we do. And, of course, even though you all are here in church and at least on some level trust me, I've little doubt myself that some wonder if I have an agenda. The truth is that I wouldn't blame you because, let's face it, lots of pastors/church leaders often do and very often these agendas don't have the congregation's best interest at heart! Your trust is something that I will never ever take for granted! And so, considering that we're living in a world much more like Thomas's than we ever have before maybe we can see Thomas' objection in a new way.

Personally, I don't think that Thomas is asking about evidence in terms of scientific proof, though that may certainly be part of it. I say that because of the use of the word "believe" that practically every translation uses. What am I talking about? Well, we hear Thomas say that he needs to "put his finger in the mark of the nails...and his hand in Jesus' side" in order to believe. The fact is, however, that "believe" actually isn't the best way to translate the original Greek word which is "pistis." The best translation would be "trust" which carries a deeper meaning. I'm guessing that we've all had trust issues at one point or another. We've all placed our trust in someone or something. I've always believed that trust must be earned, but trust is earned neither easily, nor quickly, yet trust can be broken both easily and quickly.

What is trust anyway? Well, as the guys in the men's bible study know, trust generally speaking, has to do with two things. First, **can** the person do something, and what I mean is does that person must have the ability to do something.

Second, will the person do the thing in question, and the best way to determine that is to find out if the person's done the thing in question before, ideally, **many** times before. So, Thomas needs to know who he can trust. He's likely been let been down before. As I said, trust can be broken quickly and easily. So, in his world full of dangerous powers and authorities full of people that probably don't care one whit for him, Thomas wants to know if he can trust Jesus. And isn't that what we want to know too? Not whether we believe that someone was raised from the dead, but that Jesus is the real deal...someone we can trust? Someone upon whom we can stake our life and well-being? Is He safe? It kind of depends on what your expectations are and how you define safe – but that's another sermon. In the meantime, I think you get my meaning. We're coming to know what an unsafe world feels like more and more and so maybe we now understand Thomas's real objection better than we ever have before.

And so, Thomas wants to know who he can trust in a world where there isn't much trustworthiness to be found. Yet in a world severely lacking in trust, Jesus shows up. Jesus shows up to show God's trustworthiness. Jesus shows up and offers the very things that Thomas needs in order to trust. Jesus shows up and offers the holes in His hands and in His side. These wounds and scars are important details. It isn't that just that Jesus has shown up. The wounds and scars tell the story of where Jesus has come from. For Thomas the wounds and scars tell him this; that Jesus has encountered the dangerous powers and authorities. Jesus has been betrayed and killed. But Jesus hasn't been destroyed. The dangerous powers and the authorities did not overcome. Jesus is trustworthy because all the untrustworthy things of the world didn't have the final say. Jesus is trustworthy not only because He overcome the dangerous powers/authorities but He came back for the disciples. He came back so that they, especially Thomas, would be shown the way through. The way through the danger and peril. The way that's worth the risk and uncertainty. The way through that's not necessarily **safe** but ultimately leads to life abundant, and eternal. Jesus shows that He is trustworthy, that all those things He said about dying and rising on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, all those things about the Kingdom of God coming near, about God's love and forgiveness are worth the risk. They're worth trusting in a world where there's precious little to trust in. And when he sees Jesus, when Jesus offers His hands and side, Thomas has his answer. Not the evidence we tend to think this story is about but the answer to his fears and worries, to his uncertainty and insecurity. Because, and here's the thing, the instant Thomas sees the scars – he knows! He knows that everything Jesus has ever said is true. All that Jesus revealed to the disciples throughout their entire time together over the last three years, especially what He'd told them after meal that they'd shared just a few short days ago when He told them that whoever's seen Him has seen the Father, that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

What about us? Well, we know because of Thomas' reply, the words that I believe will be on the lips of many when they find themselves face to face with Jesus, **“My Lord and my God!”** They speak volumes because they tell us that this God who is in Jesus is a God who keeps His promises, a God who is worthy of our trust.

Christ is risen indeed.

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.