

****Script Resources “No Doubt?”**

Easter 2, Year A

16th April, 2023

Psalm 16 NRSV / John 20:19-31 NIV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [*Doubting Thomas*](#) performed by Nickel Creek

written by Chris Thile, produced by Eric Valentine and Tony Berg, Sugar Hill Records, 2005

Welcoming/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Hymn *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* 37

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Thomas said:

All: **“Unless I see the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side,
I will not believe.”**

One: We are often skeptical people, driven by our senses, relying on that which we can hear, see or prove.

All: **Our Lord asks us to see the invisible, to trust in the spirit, to have faith.
Lord, give us faith!**

One: Sometimes we get carried away by our emotions, by wishful thinking and by popular trends that pull us in.

All: **Lord, help us to be bold in our beliefs, but also careful as Thomas was.
Move us beyond mere trust in ordinary things and open our eyes
for spiritual realities.**

One: Jesus said: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

All: **Amen.**

Invocation

Holy God, Nothing is beyond your power to transform! In a gray dawn, you coax songs of Alleluia! From the tombs of despair we take refuge in You call us to wake up and work. We praise you for this amazing day! Come, Risen Christ, in newness and hope on this Eastertide morning. **Amen.**

Psalm of the Day Psalm 16 NRSV

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Holy One, we confess that it has been too much. There is too much loss, too much fear, too much grief, too much despair. There's only so much we can handle and it is overwhelming us. Help us, O God, to let go of the fear that holds us in its grip and instead cling to hope. Help us, O God, to acknowledge our doubts, and yet to trust in You, to know that You are with us, and we are not alone. Help us, O God, to have faith that this too shall come to pass. Guide us in this time of uncertainty to focus on You, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Impossible God, You make all things possible. You make all things new. You called forth light when Your Spirit hovered over the waters, and there was light. You breathed into dirt and brought forth humanity. You raised Christ from the tomb. You continue to bring forth life out of death. You raise flowers from the earth after the cold winter.

We know You will bring forth life again. In this time, may we deepen our trust in You. May we strengthen our faith in humanity that love can overcome fear and hate. May we broaden our understanding of love to all who are in need. May we rise from this time with lessons learned and strive to build a better society of kindness and caring. May we remember those who are risking their lives to save lives, and those who are keeping our society running and making it possible to have food and vital services. May we our part to

ensure their health and safety now and in the time to come by working for justice for all, for living wages for all, for healthcare for all.

Impossible God, may we learn that nothing is impossible with You. We can change the world because of You. We can love one another without hate because of You. We can become a new creation because of You. Remind us, teach us, and guide us. Amen.

Hymn *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*

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Gospel Reading - John 20:19-31 NIV

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Message – *No Doubt?*

How many of us have doubts in our lives? I would wager most of us would agree that doubt is a part of life. While the ideal would be to be sure of everything we hear, learn, or encounter, the reality is that experience teaches us to often think twice before we accept circumstances as they appear. We've all heard that when "things seem too good to be true, they usually are." To use another common cliché, we are conditioned to take most things "with a grain of salt." The reality is that life is full of challenges, and we all bear scars from experiences in our lives where we were disappointed, where things did not work out as we expected. When life gets challenging, we naturally can be subject to doubt.

We can doubt the wisdom of our choices, the actions and good intentions of others, and even the benevolence of our God and Creator. But when it comes to matters of faith, there is often the subtext that to have doubt is a bad thing; that to question why things happen they way they do, is somehow a sign of weakness or a lack of commitment. But is it really? Is questioning our experience of the Divine a bad thing? There is plenty of doubt in our gospel story this morning. We often focus on "doubting Thomas," but he is not alone. In last week's reading, Mary Magdalene told the disciples of her encounter with the risen Jesus, yet obviously they didn't take her seriously. They were just as surprised when he popped up among them, and didn't believe until they saw him in the flesh. So Thomas shouldn't get a bad rap for wanting to have the same verification, for having his doubts in a story that sounded too good to be true.

Too often we equate doubt with a lack of commitment, particularly in matters of faith. Yet Thomas was clearly committed to the cause, albeit a solid realist at the same time. When Lazarus dies and Jesus heads for Judea to raise him, a mission that will ultimately end in his own death, Thomas grimly declares, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus, on the verge of his crucifixion, tells the disciples that they know where he is going, Thomas is straightforward enough to say that, in fact, they do not.

He is by no means a person of unsteady conviction, but someone who is willing to face and to name the evident difficult facts. Which is a role he continues to fulfill in this story. Like the other disciples, he has his doubts. The promise of the last few years seems to have been too good to be true. The glorious revolution they thought was beginning under the leadership of their rabbi Jesus seems to have fallen apart in disaster. Now they find themselves hunted, hiding in a locked room. Yet here Jesus appears, resurrected and back from disaster, with the wounds to prove it. A lot of the narrative focuses on those wounds, which is an important detail.

We often think that the promise of redemption and "no more tears" in heaven implies that all trace of the trials and imperfections of our earthly existence is gone. Yet here Jesus is, with the holes in his hands and side still there and not simply wiped away, proving that his path to glory was no cake walk. He too, suffered from things not working out as expected, and he too, had his doubts in the garden.

Thomas, the realist, sees the validity in acknowledging that Jesus bears the signs of his suffering; that like them, he had his own scars to bear. But he also sees the hope that offers.

Those trials prove that Jesus endured the challenges of a human life. He bore the scars of tough times and desperation, yet his return also gives evidence of renewal and hope. Those struggles, even his death, was not the end of the story. There was renewal. There is hope. Thomas, in his doubt, makes this story real. He makes this encounter human and accessible. He finds real hope in the most desperate of situations.

Where do we find our hope in our own desperate situations, in our own locked rooms? For most of us, if we're honest with ourselves, have our own doubts in our own journeys. Not only from a personal perspective, but with the situation our churches have found themselves in recently. Certainly times can be tough. Many struggle today with increased costs of the basics of life, along with the lack of adequate income. Getting by seems to be tougher and tougher. At the same time, our beloved congregations seem to be dwindling and dwindling, a process exacerbated by several years of pandemic, making us doubt that our tradition will survive. We find ourselves in much the same situation as those early disciples: struggling and afraid, often despondent and without much hope.

Yet as Jesus points out, we have had to believe all along, sight unseen. We weren't there in that locked room, we didn't have the opportunity to see the wounds, to witness that Jesus was scarred like the rest of us. But the truth revealed in that story still applies to us. We follow one who knows what it is to suffer, to have doubts, and to bear the scars of a life that doesn't always meet our expectations. One who knows what it is like to feel abandoned and alone. But also one who found resurrection and renewal. One whose suffering led to healing and hope for generations to come. Perhaps the greatest fallacy we encounter in our faith walks is that our journey is meant to be flawless and without hardship. We often like to portray the ideal Christian as one who is without doubt, walking in a perfect serene confidence; believing that everything has a purpose, and that every bad turn has a silver lining. Is that ever anyone's lived reality? Yet that's often the persona we put on. We play the role as the doubtless faithful follower without human struggles, often criticizing the Thomases among us who try to keep it real by being honest about their struggles. When people bear witness to those hardships, we often feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, and would like to ssh them. Perhaps that is why the church has such struggles now. People on the outside see the utopia that we try to play with each other, and it comes off as being the shallow illusion it often is.

Maybe it's more Thomases we need, not less. We all struggle in difficult times. It's important that we are honest with ourselves, and as people of faith with those around us, and admit that to have difficulties, to have doubts, is to be human. A strong faith is not one without doubt, but one that sees the hope that is possible: to see the hope of resurrection and renewal on the other side; to have the strength to explore those doubts and the motivation to find the truth that tough times are not the end of the story; that motivation to work to make this time and place in the story, one that leads to redemption on the other side.

The question is, are we ready to be real? Are we ready to admit our doubts, to ourselves, and to each other? Are we ready to listen and affirm the doubts of our brothers and sisters, and sit together in those questions, to lose the stiff upper lip we often like to portray? After all, we

follow a savior who struggled, who doubted, yet found resurrection. I hope we can find ways to show our own struggles and doubts to others, as those early disciples did. I hope we can find ways to offer the same hope to those around us who struggle as we do, to show that the story never ends in hopelessness and despair. And I hope we can work together to find new life through the scars we acquire in times such as these, in a community of doubt-full faith. Amen.

Call to Serve

Easter teaches us that generous love is at the heart of God's work. Joyfully we are able to give knowing that our gifts will help others to see the blessed miracle of God's creative joy.

As we listen to the following selection, Give Us Your Peace, performed by Jesse Manbusan and Sarah Hart...let's reflect how we can find our way to peace from doubt this week, and how we can share that comforting peace with others.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving God, can a generous prayer be lifted up to you this Eastertide? Can these gifts, given with love, be further transformed like echoes of grace, delighting all who receive their blessings? May it be so, through the surprising power of your Holy Spirit, and may our lives speak of a loving God, full of Easter surprises. Amen.

Hymn *I Am Weak and I need thy Strength* 553

Benediction

Christ is the one who died on the cross, but also laid in the tomb of death for three days. Christ knows our fears, what it is like to feel trapped, what it is like to live without hope. And yet, Christ rose, and we will rise. Christ lives, and we live now and forever. Christ loves us, and calls us to love one another. Live into this hope by loving one another, and trusting that Christ is with us, through all things, and will see us through. Amen.

Postlude