

April 19, 2009

Scripture: John 20: 19-31

Sermon: "Come to Believe"

I have always found it interesting that one of the first stories that the church reads after Easter is about doubt. It is about uncertainty. It is about really wondering if the resurrection, if the experience with the risen Lord, really happened. The smell of the Easter lilies is still in the air. The refrains of "Christ Arose" are still going through our head. We are still celebrating the experience at the empty tomb and one of the first lessons that we read about is about doubt, is about uncertainty, is about really wondering, almost second-guessing if the resurrection really happened.

It is human nature. I don't know if you are like me, but I fully admit, that after certain experiences, I start wondering did it really happen. After Sarah's delivery, and as I was beginning to come back to my senses, my first thought was, "Okay, what really just happened? Did I really have a baby? Or was it some sort of dream? I started to second guess the experience. This awesome, life-changing, life-transforming moment and I wasn't really sure I could trust what my mind and my body was telling me.

It wasn't until the nurse brought her in and put her in my lap that it really hit me: I just had a baby. She is here. I didn't make it up. I didn't dream it. I just had a baby.

It is human nature, after huge events in our lives happen, to start wondering if the events really happened. Once the emotions start to settle down. Once logic starts to take over. Once our world starts to get back to normal. We start wondering, "What really happened?"

And that is what the disciples are feeling and thinking in this story. They have locked themselves up in a room, and they are starting to second guess the resurrection. "Well, Mary said that she saw the Risen Lord. But, do you think it could have been grief and maybe she only wanted to think she saw Jesus?" "Well, Peter saw the wrappings in the tomb. The head wrappings were here. And the other wrappings were there. And he said that there was no body." "But do you really think we can take Peter's word for it? You know he said that he wouldn't deny Jesus, but he did?" "Well, the other disciple said that he was there too, and he said that he can verify that there was no body." "Yea, but once again, do you think it was grief and they only saw what they wanted to see?"

"Do you really think Mary saw the Risen Lord? Do you think it was a dream? It was early in the morning. Maybe she wasn't awake yet. Do you think it really happened like she said or do you think she just wanted it to happen that way?"

Do you really think Jesus was resurrected?

Doubt, uncertainty, disbelief begin to set in. Maybe it was just grief. Maybe it was just a dream. We all heard the reports that he died on the cross. We all heard the reports that said he was buried and a large stone was rolled in front of the tomb.

And finally all the disciples have to admit that they are not sure any more of what exactly happened that morning and what exactly is going on. Doubt, uncertainty and disbelief begin to set in.

Who do they believe?

The world that says that there is no way that Jesus could have been resurrected. The world that says that power and might will conquer every time. The world that says that there is no way God could love us that much that God would give God's only son so that all could have eternal life.

Or do the disciples believe in the word of Jesus that promises eternal life? Or do the disciples believe in the power and mercy of God? Or do the disciples believe in the life-changing, life-transforming love of God?

Who do they believe? Who do we believe? Some 2000 years later, who do we believe? We weren't there on that first Easter morning. We didn't have an experience like Mary and the disciples where Jesus came to us and spoke to us. We weren't there. And doubt, uncertainty, and disbelief begin to set in.

Especially when the world says that it is not logical for a man to come back from the grave. Especially when the world says that there is no way it could have happened like that because the grave has the last word. Especially when the world tells us that we are foolish to believe in the power of the cross.

Who do you believe?

John wants us to understand that the disciples believed the world until they opened their hearts up to the experience of the Risen Lord. They hid in a room instead of sharing the Good News. They believed in the "world's hostility rather than Jesus' word or resurrection" because the resurrection just doesn't make sense.

And Jesus met them in that upper room and offered them peace. He offered them an opportunity to experience the risen Lord. He offered them a chance to move from uncertainty to belief. Jesus met the disciples in that upper room. He met them where they were on their faith journey. He offered them one more chance to experience the peace that passes all understanding.

Jesus offered them a chance to grow in their faith once more. Jesus came to the disciples and said, You're right. It doesn't make sense. You're right. The resurrection defies logic. You're right. The world says that it couldn't have happened.

But what do you believe? You who have been with me from the beginning. You who have seen me heal people. You who have heard my teachings. You who know me. What and who do you believe?

Open your heart and receive the peace of God. Open your minds to the understanding that our God is a God of mystery and that we don't have all the answers. God does. Open your hearts and leave your conditions for faith at the door.

And really ask yourselves: Who do you believe?

And when we are really honest with ourselves, we admit that we believe because we have truly experienced the Risen Christ in our lives. We have felt God's love fill us and change us. We have experienced the grace of God.

we may not be able to put it in words. we may not be able to tell someone what it is really like when they experience the risen Lord. your experience with the Risen Lord is different from mine.

But we know deep down in our hearts, down in our guts that we have encountered the Risen Lord and that it is our faith that makes us believe.

And that is the Good News! Yes, the resurrection doesn't make sense. Yes, the resurrection breaks all the rules. Yes, the resurrection isn't logical.

And that is the Good News! Because the resurrection is about encountering the mystery of God. Because the resurrection is about encountering a love that does not end. Because the resurrection is about God's grace.

we are called to an Easter faith. we are challenged to have an Easter faith. Because "Easter faith does not rest on physical proof or evidence." Easter faith happens when we encounter the word of God in our lives. Easter faith happens when we encounter the Risen Lord within our community. Easter faith happens when we are confronted with the mystery of God and come to accept that we are not in control, but God is!

And that is the word of hope when doubt sets in. That is the word of hope when uncertainty sets in.

Jesus meets us where we are on our faith journeys and walks with us. Jesus meets us where we are in our doubt and in our uncertainty and gives us the opportunity to open our hearts to the mystery of God. Jesus meets us where we are as we struggle to define faith in logical terms and says just experience and know. Just open your minds to rule-breaking love of God. Just embrace the life-changing grace of God.

And then and only then will we come to believe. "It is faith, not doubt, that holds out for an experience with the Risen Lord." Faith, not doubt, that struggles to come to terms with the mystery of God. Faith, not doubt, that tries to define the unknown.

It is faith, not doubt, that brings us to belief.

May we open our hearts and minds to the mystery of God and come to believe as people of faith.

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