

## **Resurrection Living: Have Faith Anyway**

### **John 20:24-29**

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I don't know what your elementary school playground was like, but I remember mine to be more like a proving ground than a playground. A place where the verity of every assertion had to be proven before accepted as truth. "My new hot wheels car is way faster than yours!" "No way! Prove it!" "I'm stronger than you are!" "Oh, yeah? Prove it!" "I'm not scared of the principal." "Sure, you're not. Prove it!"

According to a research study by Ansly Tullus and Jacqueline D. Woolley, sometime between four and six-years-old children begin to understand that not all things are real, and not all words are true. By six years old, most have developed the ability to use evidence to help them discern truth from falsehoods and reality from imagination. Once that happens, they begin a journey that lasts a lifetime - the never-ending search for proof.

We humans are a species that like proof. The burden of proof is woven throughout our relationships and systems. We have a social contract that a person is innocent until proven guilty. We learn in science class that a hypothesis can only be confirmed when it can be proven to be true. We earn trust with a friend or partner by proving ourselves to be loyal, compassionate, and committed.

So, to me, it is no great surprise that Thomas, the disciple who wasn't in the room when Jesus came visiting after his crucifixion, is skeptical that Jesus is still alive - or alive again. He naturally wants proof. "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." Of course, Jesus appears again a few days later and this time Thomas is there. Jesus allows him to touch his wounds and Thomas is convinced. Suddenly, the impossible, that Jesus lives, has been proven true. His response is praise and awe.

Yet, Jesus doesn't leave it there. He points out that Thomas believes in his resurrection now because he has seen proof. "Because you have seen me, you have believed." Jesus knows that future seekers will not be able to touch his wounds or see his fractured hands. So, he issues this challenge - a challenge for everyone who follows, including us. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

When I first envisioned this sermon series called "Resurrection Living", my idea was that during these weeks of Eastertide, each of four preachers would share with you what they believe it means to live as Easter people. How does the resurrection impact how they live their lives? What scripture passage illuminates that for us?

Of course, if I was giving that task to Jenaba, Tim and Carole, I was giving it to myself, as well. After a great deal of thought, I chose to preach on this passage about Doubting Thomas - partly because I really relate to Thomas and his doubts, but mostly because I, like many people, have struggled to believe in what I can't see. Putting our faith in something we cannot see, we

cannot prove, is so contrary to how we generally function - we who worship at the altar of proof - and yet that is exactly what God asks of us in the resurrection.

And it's hard! How do we believe in a God we can't prove exists? How can we believe a dead man returned to life? Yet, what Jesus is saying to Thomas is that faith is believing in God without proof. That proving God really resurrected Jesus' body or Mary really was a virgin or Jesus could really perform miracles isn't the point. What God asks of us is to believe in something bigger than any one of the seemingly impossible claims in the Bible. What God asks of us is to believe in God's mission in the world - a mission to spread love, in real and tangible ways, until love has defeated hate once and for all. To me, that is what resurrection living is all about.

Several years ago, Marcus Borg wrote a beautiful blog post entitled "What Is A Christian?" He started out by saying his purpose was not to define who is in and who is out, who is Christian and who is not. Rather, he hoped to articulate what is at the heart of Christianity. Borg starts out by looking at the earliest creeds of the Christian church and points out that both the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed begin with the words "I believe". Yet, according to Borg, the meaning of that verb, "to believe" has changed. Today, we mean something like "I agree that this is true". However, in the early church, it really meant something like "I believe" or "I give my heart to". So, the ancient creeds might say "I give my heart to God, and this is what God is like." Or "I give my heart to Jesus" and this is why.

Borg goes on to say that the heart of Christianity is not so much a specific set of beliefs as a set of commitments and convictions. He summarizes them like this:

First – "A yearning and passion for God. About 1600 years ago, Augustine wrote that our hearts are restless until they find their home in God."

Second – "A passion for Jesus. Jesus is for Christians the decisive revelation of God – the decisive epiphany, disclosure, of the character and passion of God embodied in a human life. The centrality of Jesus is what makes Christians Christian."

Third – "Compassion. Compassion is the central virtue of a life centered in God as known in Jesus. When Jesus in a few words summarized theology and ethics, the character of God and how we should live, he said, 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate'. The imperative is not simply to feel compassion but to 'be compassionate'- to act in accord with the feeling."

Fourth - "A passion for the transformation of this world. Compassion – love – in the Bible has a social form. It is about participating in God's passion for a world of justice and peace. "

Resurrection living is about how we put those convictions into practice. It's about letting go of our need for proof so we can get on with the mission. Ironically, when we do that, we become the proof other people need of God's love for us and for the world offered to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we speak out when food and health care are taken away from children who live in poverty. When we say, "I am a Christian and that means I can't tolerate or participate in the exclusion or diminishment of others". When we put our hands to work and our boots to the ground in feeding the hungry, providing clean water to those who thirst and clothing to those who are without, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners. We are the embodied proof that Jesus lives.

That isn't only good for the transformation of the world, it's good for our own hearts and spirits, as well. In his words to Thomas, Jesus says that when we do believe, when we have faith in God and God's mission, then we are blessed. In this context, to be blessed means to be at peace, content or at ease.

I think all of us could use a bit more peace, contentment, and ease right now. Our world is in such turmoil. There is so much to worry about and so much to feed our anxiety. What will bring us peace is trusting that God is always nurturing life and wholeness and justice. What will bring us peace is knowing that we are helping make that happen.

There is a beautiful poem attributed to Mother Teresa which reads, "People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

We are living in a time when it is really easy to doubt God's kingdom will ever be realized. That love will ultimately win out over hate. It can be hard to believe that God is around at all and easy to question how God could let so many bad things happen. Yet, what resurrection living is to me, is to have faith anyway.

So, when you listen to the news and can't bear what you hear, have faith anyway. When people are deliberately cruel and seem to only care for power and control over others, have faith anyway. When life throws you a grief or a worry that breaks your heart or infuriates you, have faith anyway.

And remember that when you do, when you believe in the power of God's goodness, the power of love, despite all evidence to the contrary, and you challenge yourself to be part of God's mission, you become the proof of God's love that someone else needs.

May it be so. Amen.