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April 26th 2026

Scripture: John 20: 19-29

Sermon Title: Grace and Doubt

John 20:19-29

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin[a]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction:

If I were to meet the Apostle Thomas some day in heaven, I would thank him for his doubt. I feel a little bit bad for Thomas because he is known as doubting Thomas. He actually should also be known for his bravery and his accomplishments as a missionary. Tradition suggest that Thomas brought the gospel to India.

Historical Background

St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, is traditionally believed to have arrived in India in 52 CE. He is credited with establishing several churches and converting many locals to Christianity, which laid the foundation for the St. Thomas Christian community, also known as Syrian Christians or Nasrani.

Although, I think Thomas should be known for being more than a doubter, I like that he doubted because it provides a wonderful opportunity to affirm the link between grace and doubt.

What if Jesus is not offended by our doubt? What if Jesus meets us in our doubt, offering his grace and peace? What if faith is actually the fruit of honest doubt that is then met with grace and peace?

Have you ever felt pressure to have faith? One of the most impactful seasons of my life occurred when I was 25 years old and I moved for one school year to Tulsa, Oklahoma to study with a Charismatic Bible Institute called Victory. It was part of the ministry of Victory Christian Center, located right next to Oral Roberts University.

It's a longer story how a Presbyterian boy decided to join a charismatic mega church and Bible institute for a year, but today I want to highlight that although I had a great experience with Victory Bible Institute, I also struggled with some of the teaching.

You see Victory was part of the Word of Faith Movement, so we learned that faith was a necessary component of following Jesus and that faith was a significant part of moving in the gifts of the Spirit, such as healing ministry. I should say here that I still believe in

the importance of faith, but what I was taught during this time is that part of growing in faith is eliminating our doubts and replacing them with teaching from the Bible about God's truth.

I think that in some ways makes sense, but I do not think it is helpful to encourage people to give up doubting entirely. I think it is better to comfort people by letting them know that doubts are part of our faith journey. As we accept doubt as part of faith, it loses its power over us and we begin to see that Jesus is real and can meet us in our doubts.

In our story today, Thomas missed out on seeing the resurrected Jesus with the other disciples. He still has doubts and tells his friends that he will need to see and touch Jesus' scars before he believes. The cool thing is that Jesus shows up and allows him to touch his wounds. (Pause- Do you feel the power of that gesture of Jesus) Thomas feels the wounds of Jesus and then he believes. Jesus meets Thomas in his doubt. Thomas does not deny his

doubts, nor does he try to eliminate them. Instead, he honestly shares them with his friends and Jesus shows up and proves that he is real.

Friends, our faith is not dependent on us and our will power to believe. Our faith is not rooted in our obedience, but in God's grace that meets us in our weakness and empowers us to hold onto faith as God holds onto us.

I love that Jesus offers the disciples words of peace. "Peace be with you". It is a common greeting for Jews of Jesus' day, but what power Jesus brings by offering his peace. Peace is the comfort we need in the midst of our doubts. We do not need to be told to force faith. We need to be comforted with the message that in our doubts Christ will meet us and restore our faith through grace and peace.

Friends, I do hope here at our church our faith will grow together and will grow stronger. I do wish to see more openness to the power and presence of our God of love in our midst. When we worship, part of

the fruit of the grace, peace, hope, and love of God is faith. In that sense, I support growing a faith movement. I believe the word of faith movement is not all bad. It remind us to trust in the power of almighty God. I just want to comfort us by reminding us that there is always a safety net for our doubts. Even when we lose faith for a time, God will catch us in the mercy of God's grace. Restoration of faith is always possible.

We recently celebrated Earth Day, which is April 22nd each year. It is a day to remember the beauty of God's creation and our call to steward this creation with love and care. This Earth Day I was drawn to remember the space exploration of Artemis. Nasa sent four astronauts to explore the area around our moon. They came back with some beautiful photos of the earth and a few of the astronauts shared how their faith was impacted. Victor Glover, one of the astronauts, shared the following powerful words.

"You guys are talking to us because we're in a spaceship really far from Earth, but you're on a spaceship called Earth that was created to give us a place to live in the universe," Glover said. "Maybe the distance we are from you makes you think what we're doing is special, but we're the same distance from you. And I'm trying to tell you — just trust me — you are special."

"In all of this emptiness — this is a whole bunch of nothing, this thing we call the universe — you have this oasis, this beautiful place that we get to exist together," he said of Earth. "I think, as we go into Easter Sunday, thinking about all the cultures all around the world, whether you celebrate it or not, whether you believe in God or not, this is an opportunity for us to remember where we are, who we are, and that we are the same thing, and that we've gotta get through this together."

Wonderful words from Victor Glover.

His thoughts remind me that part of the way we make it through our world with our doubts is by embracing the beauty of creation and by supporting one another as human beings floating through space on this spaceship we call planet earth. When we doubt, we need each other to be the hands and feet of Christ for each other. Together, we can have faith that the future still holds hope and joy even when we at times carry great grief.

In John's gospel narrative of the story of Thomas meeting Jesus after the resurrection, Jesus says Blessed are those who have not seen me and still believe. I think these words are included in our story to remind us that even if we were not fortunate enough to be among the 500 or so folks at the time of the resurrection who saw the risen Jesus, we still can have faith that Jesus is real, that he is the resurrection and the life, that he is the Son of God who we can follow as his close friends.

And when we struggle with doubts about say... God's goodness, God's power, God's plan... let us return in humility to God with a Spirit of prayer that says, Hey God, I don't understand everything happening here on this floating planet we call earth, but I choose to trust you even with my doubts. Please awaken in me faith as I put my trust in you.

Also, I hope we realize that God does not get upset with us when we doubt. God does not get upset. God shows up. God is the one who takes responsibility for our faith. God knows it is God's responsibility to make God's self real to us, which God did by becoming one of us in Jesus. In my experience, God has a way of pursuing us even when we try to run away. God's grace is relentless, which is why I suggest we stop running and start trusting. And if it is hard to trust, lean on a friend.

I have a good friend named Dan who went through a time of real doubt a few years ago. He called one of his mentors, named Chris

Hall, who was a former professor of his from the past. Chris listened to Dan's doubts and said with kindness. Don't worry my friend, I have enough faith for both of us right now. Those kind words meant the world to Dan and Dan is now in a place of greater faith born out of the grace he receiving from his friend Chris Hall.

A final thought about grace and doubt. Sometimes we need the freedom in our journey of faith in Christ to say, "I don't know". I find great freedom in those words. I am currently listening to the autobiography of Bono, the lead singer of U2- the Rock Band from Ireland. In his autobiography, interestingly entitled Surrender, Bono reflects deeply on the mystery of his life. Since he was a young man, Bono has followed Jesus, but he has struggled at different times with faith. For example, he mother died when he was fourteen, which raised real questions for him about how God does or does not answer prayers. He has had doubts. One of Bono's songs is "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" (sing those lines)

It is a song that reminds us that even when we know Jesus, we might have longings in our lives that require greater exploration. We may sometimes experience moments genuine doubt. In those times, its okay to admit that we have questions. It's okay to say, we don't always know the answers.

Although we have found Jesus, we will still have moments of doubt. In those moments, cry out to Jesus and say, Hey, please meet me in my doubt. Maybe Jesus will show you his wounds, which will then remind you that he sees your wounds and you can put your trust in him. Let us surrender together to the great mystery of Christ and his love and the wonderful connection between grace and doubt. Let us pray...