

Sermon 16 April 2023 Doubting Thomas

John 20:19-29

I want to focus this morning on the person of Thomas, because I believe that Thomas speaks for so many of us. Thomas had doubts – we all have doubts. It is very human to have doubts. It is ok to have doubts. Thomas wants tangible proof, and without that tangible proof, he is reluctant to believe. Join the club. Who wouldn't like tangible proof? It would certainly make believing in God somewhat easier.

So what we are talking about here is faith, and that's what faith is – believing in something that cannot be proved. It can be difficult, and it calls for a degree of trust. Let me give you an example.

I have faith that it will rain tomorrow. Why? Mainly because I trust the weather forecast. Now, some of you might say, 'You silly goat!' But the point is, neither the weather forecast or I can prove that it will rain, not until after it has happened. So it requires an act of faith, and implicit in this act of faith is trust.

So why do I have faith in God? I actually touched on this on Easter Sunday, but let's recap and amplify. Firstly, because I trust the writers of the Bible. No book has been more thoroughly examined, dissected and critiqued, and it remains the most quoted and widely-read book in the Western world; because I trust the history of our church, an incredible history and you cannot deny history; because I trust the stories of millions of people throughout the ages who have experienced God and the risen Christ, albeit in spiritual form (their stories are well documented); because I trust prayer – I have tried it and it works; because I trust the inspiration that has led to the most amazing and breath-taking buildings of worship and works of art and music. I cannot believe for one minute that they are a product of a myth.

So yes, there is more than a significant degree of trust involved, but just as the weather forecast is based on a wide range of factual information, so my trust in God is similarly based.

I am sure you have at some time watched trapeze artists in action. There is a special relationship between flyer and catcher. The flyer is the one who lets go, and the catcher is the one who catches. As the flyer swings high above the crowd, the moment comes when he or she has to let go (let's go with she). She arcs out into the air. Her job is to remain as still as possible and wait in complete trust. The catcher will catch her but she must wait. She must never have any doubts and make a grab for the catcher – that could lead to disaster.

So it is with us and our faith in God. We need to trust. Yes, we need to reach out, but we need to have complete trust that God will catch us. *'Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.'* Psalm 37:5.

Now, I appreciate that there are times when this can be quite difficult, because there are times when, despite our constant prayers, things don't go our way. It's not easy, at these times, to maintain that trust and faith. I think in the end it comes down to a matter of attitude. We are invariably powerless to control what happens to us but we can control how we respond.

In World War II, Viktor Frankl was sent to a Nazi concentration camp. The guards deprived him of everything. They took his wife, his family, his clothes. They even stole his wedding ring. But he had one thing no one could take from him. In a classic book, he wrote, *'The last of human freedoms is the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances.'* The guards could not take from Frankl his freedom to choose his attitude.

With regards our faith in God, it often can be a case of an attitude of perseverance. Look at Job. He lost everything, he persevered with regards his faith in God, and God rewarded him. He finished up with more than he had before. I certainly hope we don't have to experience the woes and losses that Job experienced in order to be blessed by God, but there is an undeniable message of remaining steadfast in faith in the midst of trials and tribulations in the story of Job.

Let me give you some quotes to ponder on. *'Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.'* Psalm 55:22. *'God blesses the people who patiently endure testing.'* James 1:12. *'But those who endure to the end will be saved.'* Matthew 24:13. And remember this, *'For nothing is impossible with God.'* Luke 1:37.

Let me refer back to Thomas. Thomas was lucky, because Jesus was able to walk up to him and show him the proof. But Jesus is not going to walk up to us, not in physical form anyway. But if we can overcome our doubts, if we can, like the trapeze artist, reach out in trust, even if that at times calls for a degree of perseverance, then we will experience God and reap the rewards.

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