

Doubt and Believe

First Congregational Church Branford

John 20:19-29; April 28, 2019

Confirmation Day

Rev. Suzanne Personette

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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."

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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."

The Sunday after Easter is the church coming down off of its resurrection high - when some ask the question, did that really happen? I think I was just taken in by the aroma of those lilies – they get'cha every year. But, *now* my mind has taken hold of my senses and says, "Ya know, I'm not so sure about this resurrection thing, after all."

But, there's a place for doubt in the life of faith. Everyone experiences moments of doubt - times when God seems so far off that it can make you question if there really is a God.

Doubt means at least you're in the conversation. Questioning, struggling – it's all part of the human experience. Besides, there is no **perfect** faith. I worry sometimes that people don't come to church because they don't really believe everything. It's okay - maybe I don't believe everything! I think the most important thing for God is that we're all together. Don't you think? Caring for

each other.

I usually confirm youth on Pentecost; this is a first for Doubting Thomas Sunday!; but it's a perfect time to confirm - when youth may be wrestling with their faith - maybe they believe, maybe they don't believe, maybe they have hope that they will come to believe. They're in the right place.

Let's look at the text. The disciples are sad that their God light had been taken. *And*, they're hidden away behind a locked door, afraid the officials would come to crucify them next! At the moment of greatest fear, Jesus shows up. He says 3 times in this passage, *which means it's important* – so, we need to hear it: *Peace be with you...* And, he breathes on them: *Receive the Holy Spirit*.

To hear *peace be with you* over and over, doesn't that just make you want to calm down, lower your shoulders, untighten your jaw and forehead? When you're worried, tense, or doubting, "*peace be with you*". Jesus knew the disciples needed assurance that he was with them. Maybe you need some assurance today - peace be with you. And, Jesus breathed on them to receive his Holy Spirit.

You confirmands will receive the Holy Spirit today, and it will be with you your whole life long. Your job will be to remember that you've received it, that you have it inside of you... always.

What I know for sure is that whatever doubts any of us have, whatever pain and worry, whatever fear and anxiety, *whatever* your deepest need, God will come to you. And, he'll say... *Peace be with you*.

In the story, Jesus decides to prove himself - *one time*. He lets Thomas touch his wounded hands and side. He says, "*do not doubt, but believe.*" Believe because of what you know in your *heart* to be true." Don't believe because you saw it, believe it because you know it, you know me.

I know it's not always easy to believe in God – boats sink, planes disappear out of the sky, mudslides and tsunamis occur, any number of tragedies... The truth is, God gave us an imperfect, broken, world of uncertainty. I don't understand a lot of things in this world. I tried for 10 years to do life without God. I let the light inside of me burn out. And, I had no peace. Until I believed what I knew in my heart to be true. I don't like a lot of things in the world, but I know that God loves the world. Even as it is. When I accept that we live in a broken world, Jesus leans in and says, *peace be with you*. That's what I need. Peace, in the midst of chaos, peace, in the midst of turmoil. How does that sound to you? Peace which passes all understanding.

It's empowering to believe in God, *and* to believe in yourself. We believe in you here, and we encourage you to believe in God, and in yourself. Many generations have come and gone who did not see Jesus, *and yet believed*. We are among them, and we are blessed. Amen.

