

Fifth Sunday after Easter
May 14, 2017
John 20:24-31

In Christ Jesus, our Resurrected Savior, who has appeared unto us through His Almighty Word, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How would you like to be known as Mopey Mary, or Miserly Mike, or even Maniac Mark? Those aren't complementary names. Neither is Doubting Thomas. It is a truly amazing fact that one of the clearest, most famous declarations of Christ's divinity---His being true God---was made by a man who is most often called Doubting Thomas. Even today, the term "doubting Thomas" is still used for those who do not believe what they are told.

The past two weeks we have been hearing about our Savior's resurrection appearances. We heard the heart-warming story from Emmaus where Jesus brought hope, understanding, joy, and comfort to two confused and grieving disciples. We were also in that closed room Easter evening when Jesus appointed His disciples and us to be His ambassadors to proclaim the Easter message of **PEACE**, sending us to go out into the world with the authority to forgive and retain sins in Jesus' name.

Well, there was one disciple who was not there on that Easter Sunday evening; that was Thomas. We are not told where he was, but his absence from his fellow believers that night, almost brought about his spiritual ruin.

Imagine the joy that must have filled the disciples' hearts after all those events Easter day. Yet we are told in almost every Gospel account that their joy and excitement was mixed with confusion and doubt. Luke tells us that at first **THE WORDS OF THE WOMEN SEEMED TO THEM AS IDLE TALES (FOOLISH WORDS)**. When Mary Magdalene reported the same thing we're told in Mark **WHEN THEY HEARD HE WAS ALIVE, AND HAD BEEN SEEN OF HER, THEY DID NOT BELIEVE**. Mark again tells us that when the two Emmaus disciples returned to tell the other disciples what had happened to them that at first **THEY DID NOT BELIEVE**. Even when Christ stood suddenly in their midst we're told **BUT WHILE THEY STILL DID NOT BELIEVE FOR JOY AND MARVELED**.

A question needs to be asked. Why was it so hard to believe this fact of Jesus' resurrection even with the risen Christ standing right there in front of them? The answer: Because it was contrary to their human reason and emotion. In Luke we are told **AND HE OPENED THEIR UNDERSTANDING, THAT THEY MIGHT COMPREHEND THE SCRIPTURES**. Once they understood the Scriptures they believed.

That brings us to this morning's theme; which is a question:

WHAT KIND OF FAITH SAVES?

Jesus elevated the simple faith of a child as the greatest of all? So is that **BLIND FAITH? No!**

I: "Blind Faith" rests on Nothing.

Blind faith is like believing that next year I'll be a millionaire, or I'll fly to the moon. There are no assurances, no promises to either of those expectations. Blind faith is like walking through a seedy part of town trusting that no one will jump out at you and rob you, but having no assurance at all of that not happening. That is not the kind of faith that scripture speaks of, a faith that rests on nothing, a faith that has no assurances! That kind of faith is the kind that evolutionists have when they talk about their billions and billions of years and their evolutionary process of advanced mutations from simpler forms to more complex. There is no evidence, nothing upon which to base such faith. They just expect you to believe them because they are scientists and they said so! That's blind faith.

But what about Thomas' faith? He was told by His friends, the other disciples that Jesus was alive. He heard the reports from so many eye witnesses. But Thomas could not accept that.

II: Thomas' "Faith" rested on his Reason, Senses and Feelings.

It couldn't be true! He knew that Jesus was dead. That was a fact. Perhaps he had even seen the dead body of Jesus being laid into the tomb. How could He be alive? When the others kept telling him of their experiences, he could not accept their eye witness testimony. Rather, he insisted, yes, even demanded that he must first see the nail marks; that he must put his finger into the nail prints; that he must put his hand into the Lord's side; or he would not believe. This was more than doubt. This was unbelief, unbelief which makes excessive demands and sets its own terms. Much like the person who declares; "If there is a God, then let Him show me He exists by doing this or that thing or I will not believe in Him."

Thomas' so called "faith" rested on his senses. He would not believe unless and until he could see, touch and feel. His "faith" rested on his emotions, feelings and reason and because of that he spent a whole week in miserable doubt, uncertainty and unbelief. No doubt his heart wanted to believe what he was told but his head did not allow it.

A week later the disciples again were gathered together behind closed and locked doors, only this time Thomas was also with them. Jesus again appears and again greets them with the words, **PEACE BE TO YOU.** Immediately Jesus turns to Thomas and says...**REACH YOUR FINGER HERE, AND LOOK AT MY HANDS; AND REACH YOUR HAND HERE, AND PUT IT INTO MY SIDE. DO NOT BE UNBELIEVING, BUT BELIEVING.**

Jesus appeared especially for Thomas' sake. What condescending love! Jesus met the conditions which Thomas had demanded, but which he had no right to set. In order to banish all doubts from his mind as well as to strengthen the other disciples, Jesus invited Thomas to do as he wanted. **“Put your finger in My nail prints, thrust your hand into My side. DO NOT BE UNBELIEVING, BUT BELIEVING!”**

The raging sea of doubt and unbelief in Thomas' heart threatened to engulf him and drown him in the bottomless pit of despair. But Jesus would not allow this to happen. The Lord came to Thomas to save him. Here we see the depths of our Savior's love and patience. Reaching out time and time again to His disciples, babying them along in their weak faith and yet now once more to this doubter.

The interval of one week, making Thomas wait in doubt and confusion and despair, plus the words of our Lord to Thomas served as admonition and correction to him. In essence Jesus is saying; **“THOMAS, REFLECT ON WHAT YOU SAID; REALIZE JUST WHAT YOU DECLARED AND MEANT LAST WEEK. THE WORDS OF YOUR FELLOW DISCIPLES WERE TRUE, YOU SHOULD HAVE BELIEVED THEM.”** Jesus repeated the very words that Thomas had said, to prove that He who knows all things had heard him, knew his thoughts and knew the doubt that was in his heart.

This condescending and admonishing love of Jesus bore fruit immediately. With a single stroke, the scales of unbelief and doubt fell from Thomas' heart. He comes forth from the deep darkness of doubt into the sunlight of faith. It's no longer necessary for him to put his finger in the nail prints or his hand into Jesus' side. The fact that Jesus knew what he had said, how he was feeling, what he was thinking was to Thomas proof of the resurrection, more convincing than anything he could touch, feel or see.

Thomas' confession as we said earlier, is one of the clearest given in scripture concerning Jesus being **TRUE GOD!** Thomas declared **MY LORD AND MY GOD!** It was a confession of faith as well as a proclamation of Joy. With the word MY, Thomas lays hold of Christ in a far more secure way than his hands could ever have done; he lays hold of his Savior with his heart. Jesus, You are **MY** Lord and You are **MY** God!

Jesus accepts this confession of Thomas' faith, showing that He is pleased to be called God; for He is God, God the Son. **YOU HAVE BELIEVED,** Jesus declares. But then He adds very important words for Thomas' future life. **YOU HAVE BELIEVED BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN ME;** but faith is not dependent upon sight, or feeling, or emotions, or senses, or reason; it does not rest upon ourselves; rather it rests upon the clear testimonies and promises of God in His Word. **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.**

III: “Saving Faith” rests on the Word of God.

How can anyone believe if they have not seen? Because they have heard! Paul tells us in Romans **AND HOW SHALL THEY BELIEVE IN HIM OF WHOM THEY HAVE NOT HEARD, SO THEN FAITH COMES FROM HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD.**

Martin Luther put it this way: **I BELIEVE WHAT GOD'S WORD PROMISES, IF I FEEL IT OR IF I DON'T FEEL IT.** Another man wrote **JUSTIFYING FAITH IS FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD...TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST MEANS TO BELIEVE WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HIM.** In Hebrews we're told **NOW FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN.** In II Cor. Paul writes **WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.** Does this mean "blind faith?" Not at all! The Lord has given us His Word and His many promises on which to base our faith.

Oh, how much we need to remember this in times of sorrow, grief, and trials. When our eyes, heart and mind see what looks like God turning away from us, allowing terrible things to happen to us, it is easy for us to also doubt like Thomas did. We want to base our faith on what we see, what we think, what we feel. How could God be alive and loving and let this happen? Doubt and confusion fills our heart. That is why we need to again and again turn to His Word, not to our feelings, not to our emotions or senses.

God's Word tells us that God so loved this whole world that He sent His only begotten Son to live and

die for us. God's Word tells us that He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all how will He not with Him also give us all things? God's Word tells us that God is love and that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are the called according to His purpose. God's Word tells us that God's ways are far above our ways and His thoughts above our thoughts and we should not try to figure them out, but simply trust the promises and assurances He has given us, and they are many. We could spend the rest of this morning bringing one passage of promise after another upon which to base and rest our faith.

That is why John concludes this section of His Gospel with these words; **AND TRULY JESUS DID MANY OTHER SIGNS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK; BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT BELIEVING YOU MAY HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME.** True, saving faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world is based upon the Word of God. This saving faith in Jesus gives us everlasting life. Jesus did come into this world to live as our Substitute and to die in our place to pay for the punishment of our sins and earn for us forgiveness, life and salvation. He did rise from the dead thereby assuring us of a resurrection also. That is the sum and substance of Christianity, to believe that is to have everlasting life.

WHAT KIND OF FAITH SAVES?

"Blind faith?" **NO!** Faith does not rest upon nothing.

Does faith rest upon our feelings, senses, reason, and emotions? **NO!**

The essence of faith is to **TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD!** When He promises something, faith believes it! Faith rests upon the sure promises and blessings of God in Christ.

Are we confused and frustrated with life and its many trials and troubles? Do we have doubts? Do we worry? Do we despair? We all do!

May we turn only to God's Word, trust what our Lord says to us in His Word and then pray as the believing father who said; **LORD, I BELIEVE, HELP MY UNBELIEF!**

Amen