

Sermon – “I believe” – 4-8-18

Pause and Reflect...

There is something about Thomas that I like – I have an affinity for him - Think about it: anyone who is known by both “Saint Thomas” and “Doubting Thomas” has to be interesting, difficult to nail down, and someone most of us can relate to. But what do we really know about Thomas? Earlier in John's Gospel, there's a scene where Jesus is talking to his disciples about returning to Judea, the very place where the crowds had almost stoned him on their last visit. While some of the disciples advised caution, Thomas is quoted as saying, “Let us all go, that we might die with him!” This guy has nerve.

Thomas seems to be a passionate man, he wasn't afraid to travel. There is evidence that after the Resurrection he headed east, to share the good news in India. “Thomasite” churches exist in India that can be traced back to Thomas. Thomas was opinionated; he was a skeptic, or a realist. Our reading says that the disciples were together in the house where they met when Jesus came to them; but Thomas was not with them. Where had he been? Maybe he was out trying to wrap his head around the fact that his friend and Lord had been crucified on the cross and his ministry had come to a dramatic and horrific end. Maybe he was consoling himself with other friends or meditating somewhere – we don't really know.

When his friends, the other disciples told him the story of the Resurrection, it seemed too far-fetched, too unbelievable. He wanted to believe, but sometimes believing is so hard. There's a scale for belief. The longer one has lived, the more pain one has experienced, the more times one has been deceived, the less likely one is to be taken in or captivated by testimony of others.

We are not born doubters; those who are wise learn to doubt, it is a way we discern what is real and what isn't. The truth is, we want to believe, but then something happens to cause disbelief.

This is what seems to be happening in our society at the moment, what we want to believe is being overshadowed by the corruption of others – it is hard to know what is true and what isn't. Things that have been trusted seem less trustworthy at the moment. Personal security is threatened by the companies who seek to buy and sell our individual information listed on Social Media to the highest bidder in order to influence us and others in the way we vote and how we make purchases, but most importantly in how we believe!

As we remember and acknowledge the death of MLK this week, many of his writings and beliefs came forward. I took some time to read through some of his history and writings. I also tried to recall his death and what really killed him, not who it was but what it was that people had such great difficulty with that ended in his assassination on that day 50 years ago. I am finding these reasons: "Fear, Delusion, Ignorance, and Intolerance – still seem to be the same reasons people are using as excuses today for inequality and prejudice.

Fifty years ago, those forces killed MLK, wasn't just a sniper at a motel. These same forces continued to try to kill the mission of the civil rights movement. . I was only 10 years old when MLK was killed, so my direct memories are foggy, but I do remember a feeling of uneasiness. Some people didn't like him, and in my reading I find it was because he was a trouble maker wanting equality for African Americans and all people, through non-violent demonstration. Some people thought Jesus was a trouble maker and crucified him, because he wanted to bring light to the nations and in the same way Martin Luther was excommunicated for the reforms he demanded of the church.

Like Thomas, MLK had his own doubts about faith. As a young boy he was skeptical of many of Christianity's claims, even doubting the bodily resurrection of Jesus which he questioned during Sunday school when he was 13 years old. At a young age King, became known for his quotes and stated; "doubts began to spring forth unrelentingly." (King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1998). Carson, Clayborne, ed. Autobiography. Warner Books. ISBN 0-446-52412-3.) He also stated that the Bible has "many profound truths which one cannot escape," ("An Autobiography of Religious Development". The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute. Stanford University. Retrieved April 2, 2016.)

Again, for Thomas it was a misnomer to describe him as a "Doubter" for he was a man of faith, but he was realistic. Who among us wouldn't have asked the same questions or made the same statements, especially if we weren't a part of the group of disciples gathered when the Risen Christ came to them? Thomas could not believe based on the others' testimony. It just wasn't going to happen for him and that really didn't seem to bother Jesus at all. Jesus didn't rebuke or scold him but invites him to see and place his hand in Jesus' side. Thomas experiences the reality of the Risen Christ and cries out; "My Lord and my God!" This "cynic" was instantly tamed realizing that honest faith can be formed in the midst of crisis or doubt.

It was through the most difficult situations that MLK gave some of his most profound sermons and speeches. In his "I have a dream speech:" He stated: "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith...With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”
MLK stood up for what he believed and risked his life for that belief.

On this Second Sunday of Easter we focus on the thoughts of unity, diversity, hope, faith, doubt, of what it means to be grounded in the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead. Remember that MLK doubted the concept of the Resurrection when he was a thirteen year-old boy. He resolved his struggle with Christianity and other doubts of faith by believing that the church offered the best options to curb "an inner urge to serve humanity."

MLK was also one of the youngest to receive the Nobel peace Prize. Reflect with me this morning on this portion of his acceptance speech which he gave when he received this prestigious award: “I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. I believe that even amid today's mortar bursts and whining bullets, there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men (and women). I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down men

other-centered can build up. I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid." I still believe that We Shall overcome!

This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born. (MLA style: "Martin Luther King Jr. - Acceptance Speech". Nobelprize.org.

Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 8 Apr 2018.

<http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance_en.html>) // – I

believe - How do you express what you believe? Amen.