

Sermon: Trusting Your Doubts

Year C, Easter 2

[Acts 5:27-32](#); [Psalm 150](#); [Revelation 1:4-8](#); [John 20:19-31](#)

Offered April 3, 2016 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

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When we see them in this story, the disciples are hidden in Jerusalem behind a locked door. These are tough guys, fishermen who pull nets by hand, toll collectors who take the abuse of people being taxed to death, and farmers who have grown crops in a desert. These are guys, like Thomas, who know every con game in the book because in first century Palestine if you were poor and you weren't wise, you'd lose everything.

And yet these tough guys joined up with people even further down the social ladder, as well as some of the wealthy, to follow Jesus of Nazareth. To follow him as he spread the Good News about the Kingdom of God. Followed him into Jerusalem, through the confrontation in the Temple, through his show trial by the Romans, at every step fully expecting something to turn it around, because Jesus was the real deal.

Like the reading from Acts said, they were willing to stand up and speak out against the authorities. Perhaps that was the most convincing proof of all that Jesus wasn't just talking a good game. He got people to change, to believe in each other, to take care of each other the way Moses and the prophets said God wants us to.

I've worked for some charismatic people in my business career. I can think of two right off the bat, both men, both smooth, clever, quick to spot possibilities. When I talked with each of them, it was like standing in a spotlight. I was the most important person they were going to get to talk to that day. They told me about how transformative the products were going to be, how important the team was that we were building, how phenomenal the rewards were going to be. Oh the money was going to be nice, but the reputation, man, we would be *known* in the internet start up world. All I had to do was what I did really well, just follow my natural instincts. I knew my ego was being appealed to, but it was business, and I could separate their spin from the real business arguments underneath.

And when it all crashed and burned, after months and months and months of 12 hour days? I was furious with them for taking advantage of so many good people just to puff their own egos. Once I was through my hissy fit with them, I was mad at myself. I had been played. I had let myself get played. I had all the warning signs in front of me and I didn't read them.

And worse, I got played twice. The second time worse than the first. The second guy got me because of the people he had around him. Amazing, talented, smart people who could go anywhere on the East or West coast and find top dollar gigs in any software shop. Guy number two was convincing, but what got me was the people. Why did it take a train wreck before any of us saw trouble coming?

In today's Gospel reading, Thomas has had his train wreck. Jesus had been crucified as common criminal. This incredible community, that was willing to teach Jesus' lessons, had left Jesus to die on his own. What were they even still doing in Jerusalem, where the Romans have already proven that they were ready, willing and able to kill an innocent man to look like they were in charge? Every member of that community had to be wondering if it hadn't been some huge mistake. If they were right and Jesus was the real deal, then why had it turned out so horribly?

Or did the mistake come later? They had heard from Mary Magdalene that Jesus was alive in Jerusalem and they hadn't believed. Jesus had appeared to them behind a locked door and they didn't recognize him. A week later, they're still hiding behind locked doors. Given their track record under pressure, I would doubt them too. So Thomas tells the other disciples that he knows he can trust his senses. He may not be able to trust his own judgment, and he's certainly not going to trust theirs, but his hands have never misled him.

Suddenly Jesus appears. He comes just for Thomas, because Thomas wasn't there the last time. Jesus' love for Thomas survives the crucifixion. The love is right there in the room with them. Jesus assures Thomas that there is peace between them, despite Thomas leaving Jesus to die alone. Jesus tells Thomas to go ahead, to do what Thomas needs to trust himself again. Jesus knows it's not every day that God steps into history and rights a terrible wrong. No wonder Thomas needs his hands to believe what his head and heart simply won't trust. Jesus tells Thomas to go ahead and touch.

Notice that the Gospel didn't say that Thomas touched Jesus. It was enough that Jesus loved him personally that much, that Jesus thought he was worth coming back for, that the community itself was worth rebuilding. In John's Gospel, Thomas, the one who wasn't going to be played for a fool, is the one to declare Jesus "Lord and God", to declare that it was time to remove all doubt and get back to the work of bringing in the Kingdom.

Jesus is also explicit that it would have been better if Thomas had simply believed. Because Jesus wasn't running a con, where all we have to do is what we already want to do. Jesus assured everyone that what he was asking was going to require enormous change and be unbelievably hard and incredibly unpopular. He asked us to love God with all our heart and love our neighbors as ourselves.

So let's take the message of Thomas into this Easter season. Let's celebrate the incredible magnitude of Jesus' love that brings him back to this world for countless groups of sinners who have doubts. Let's recognize that Jesus loves each of us personally so much that he'll make a special trip, that he needs us as a vital part of this community which is bringing forth his Kingdom on earth. We all make mistakes, we all sin, as individuals and as a community, by what we do and what we don't do.

But as we wonder if maybe we haven't made a mistake, let's remember Thomas, and his doubts in himself and in the people he trusted. Because when we say "Lord and God", we are being welcomed once again into the light and truth of this Kingdom, where our belief will give us life in his name. Amen