

Although you have not seen him, you love him,
and even though you do not see him now,
you believe in him
and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,
Amen
1 Peter 1:8

Good Morning.

In the gospel reading this morning John continues the Easter story. It is later in the day on that first Easter. The disciples – all of them except Thomas – are huddled in a room together in fear of the authorities and those in power. Despite the locked doors Jesus enters the room and appears to them. Now these disciples are fearful not only for their lives but are also fearful of what might've happened to the body of their teacher and friend. He's no longer in the tomb? What could that mean? They are fearful and full of doubt. But Jesus comforts them with his words "Peace be with you" (John 20:19) and by showing them the wounds on his hands and his side. Then the disciples, convinced, rejoiced. Now it's interesting to keep in mind as we continue reading this gospel that the disciples in that room did not believe immediately when they saw the risen Christ. It took a little bit on Christ's part - showing them his wounds - to convince them that he was truly the risen Christ.

Remember, from last week's Easter Sunday gospel that these the same disciples heard from Mary Magdalene and the other Mary of the events at Jesus's tomb - of the angels in blazing white, and the earthquake, the rock that rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. And surely the Marys had told the disciples of their encounter with the risen Christ. But still the disciples doubted until the risen and wounded Lord appeared to them.

Now Thomas was not with them on the Easter Sunday when Christ first appeared to them. Much as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had brought the story to the disciples, the disciples told the story of the risen Christ to Thomas. Like the other disciples Thomas was doubtful. So doubtful that he said:

"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." (John 20:22)

So when Christ returned to that room on the following Sunday - the Sunday after Easter - he gave Thomas an opportunity to see his wounds and touch his wounds. He didn't respond by being angry at Thomas for his doubt or casting him out of the room telling him that he could no longer be a disciple but rather he gave him the opportunity to renew his faith. Thomas responds with one of the most beautiful affirmations of faith in the Bible: "My Lord and my God". (John 20:28)

Now God could have arranged to have Thomas be there with the other disciples on Easter Sunday so why didn't he? Is there a message in this to us? Certainly Jesus gives a message to Thomas when he says to him "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:29)

And yet isn't that a message for the other disciples in the room? Isn't that a message for you and me?

Now I could end this homily right here and it might've increased your understanding somewhat - perhaps giving you a new slant on Thomas but would it have helped you if you experience doubt?

In our Christian journey people seem to come to belief in different ways. Some are raised in a household full of God's love and learn to believe even as they learn to walk and talk. And this kind of faith often stays with them throughout life. Others have a mountaintop experience in which they encounter God themselves and through this encounter come to have faith. Many of you remember Father Tom Furrer who often told the story of his own experience. It wasn't on a mountaintop - it was in a plowed field at night - a night that he spent in prayer and wonder. And this marked him for his entire life and changed his entire life. He lives in the certainty of God's love.

But what about the rest of us? Perhaps we grew up in homes where we went to church on Sundays and then didn't talk about God much the rest of the week. Perhaps experiences in our life have made us wonder if God was truly there and if he loved us. Or perhaps doubt simply came into our lives unbidden and for no particular reason.

Now in some faith traditions, doubt is seen as a serious sin one that separates an individual from God. But I think we Episcopalians (and other faith traditions) see this a little differently.

We see doubt as an inseparable component of faith. Sometimes it is through doubt that we come most truly to believe.

But how does that work – once doubt has entered in how do you continue on as a faithful follower of God and Jesus Christ?

Can you reason yourself out of doubt? Convince yourself with some exceedingly clever arguments that God exists and loves us? That Christ was the son of God?

Possibly. I'm sure that there are people who have done that but for many of us the tools that we need to deal with doubt are the tools we have available to us every day. Prayer, sacraments, meditation, Bible study – and the support of our Christian community. Look around you. These are the people who help when doubt troubles you – they may never know that they've helped you and yet their witness and their presence can be what you need to reassure you of God's reality and God's love.

You know, I had a great opportunity to sing at Canterbury Cathedral a few years ago with a group that I studied with. And I remember a sermon given during that week speaking of an earlier Archbishop of Canterbury who lost his faith. Who was full of doubt. And how did this Archbishop behave? He behaved -at least to the exterior - exactly as he had behaved before. He kept on with his prayers. He kept on with the sacraments. He kept on loving and serving the community gathered around him. He remained faithful.

One of the things that I have slowly come to learn is that the Bible speaks to us all the time about the faithfulness of God. Think about the Hebrews wandering in the desert after they had escaped from Egypt. They weren't very faithful. Much of the

time they went about complaining - moaning and groaning about the difficulty of their life in the dessert. They even raised up false gods to worship. But God was faithful. He didn't leave them there in the desert alone. He stayed with them. He stayed with them until he brought them to the holy land.

And so God will stay with us, will bless us even in times of doubt. We need to be faithful in our actions - To continue to stay close to God, even if we wonder at the meaningfulness of what we are doing. To listen with our hearts for God because we know he will be there for us.

Most of us are familiar with the great songwriter Leonard Cohen.

In his song "Anthem", he says:

"There is a crack, a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in."

I think the crack is our doubt, our questions. And the light that gets in - I think that is the light of God shining on us.

Amen