

Text: John 20:19-29
Theme: Easter Faith
Date: April 20, 2017 (Easter 2A)

In the Name of our Risen Lord, Dear Christian Friends,

The week after Easter might well be called NATIONAL FAITH week because there is absolutely no reason to come to church this weekend except FAITH in Jesus Christ. All over the country this weekend, churches will be as empty as they were full last week. There are no special choirs, no brass, no breakfast, no family gatherings, and no new clothes to wear. All there is to draw the faithful to worship is FAITH in Jesus Christ.

The week after Easter could be a time of pessimism and sadness for the church with all of the emotional “let downs” from last week. But that’s not the way our Lord wants it to be.

- Like every day of our lives, the week after Easter is a time to rejoice. It’s a time to bask again in the real spiritual joy of Easter.
- It’s a time to remind ourselves again that God keeps all his promises to us, that he forgives us, and that one day we are going to come alive physically out of our graves.
- It’s a time to count our blessings from God. It’s a time to be thankful for all the people who do have faith in Jesus and to appreciate God’s blessing through them.
- It’s a time to remember those who are not as close to their risen Lord as God would want them to be. It’s a time to encourage those whose faith is weak so that they might have the same inexpressible joy in the risen Lord that we have.

The story of doubting Thomas on the week after Easter gives us the opportunity to do all of these things. It gives us an opportunity to put our *Easter Faith* into practice.

So if this week could affectionately be called NATIONAL FAITH week, what exactly is faith? What does it mean to have Easter faith? What is it that causes people to worship not only on Easter but on the week after Easter, in the middle of July and the Sunday after Christmas? What is it that carries the faithful through crises and cancer, through pain and poverty, through sickness and dying? What causes them to quietly encourage others even while they have their own crosses to bear? Our Bible reading today answers that very important question: *What is Easter faith?* God wants us to know that Easter Faith leads us to do two things: 1) It leads us to trust before we have the victory, and 2) It leads us to trust even though you can’t yet see the victory.

Jewish Leaders and the Crowds

The Passion History of our Lord is one account after another of individuals or groups of people who demonstrated a weak faith or no faith at all. The Jewish religious leaders never did accept Jesus by faith; instead they viewed him as a trouble maker. The crowds who followed Jesus were so fickle. When he made it clear that he had not come to put food on their plates or to make their earthly lives better or to drive out the Romans, many turned away from him and never came back. The crowds who cheered Jesus on Palm Sunday were jeering him by Good Friday. There were so many fair-weather friends. There were so many fickle-minded followers. They were there to be helped, healed and fed. But they didn’t want to suffer with Jesus and wait for the final victory in heaven. They wanted their victory and they wanted it now.

Disciples

We might have expected better from Jesus’ own disciples. How patiently he had instructed them for two and a half years! How often he spoke about carrying the cross of faith, the last being first and the first being last, and of his own need to die to gain the victory? But already at the Last Supper, Judas got up and left to betray him for money. His three closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) fell asleep at the Garden of Gethsemane in his darkest hour. They all ran away when he was arrested. And Peter denied with cursing and swearing that he even knew Jesus. And where were they on Easter morning? Out at the tomb waiting for Jesus to rise? Proclaiming his victory to others? Celebrating his resurrection? No! They were locked up behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Jesus had to come to them. They all wanted the victory before they would trust. They wanted success before they would believe.

In many respects, doubting Thomas, the man in our text, got a bad rap. He got a bad rap because there were many more doubting Thomases that just him. The only difference was when they doubted. While many wanted success before they trusted, Thomas wanted to see before he would trust. **NOW THOMAS (CALLED DIDYMUS), ONE OF THE TWELVE, WAS NOT WITH THE DISCIPLES WHEN JESUS CAME. SO THE OTHER DISCIPLES TOLD HIM, "WE HAVE SEEN THE LORD!" BUT HE SAID TO THEM, "UNLESS I SEE THE NAIL MARKS IN HIS HANDS AND PUT MY FINGER WHERE THE NAILS WERE, AND PUT MY HAND INTO HIS SIDE, I WILL NOT BELIEVE IT."**

Today

There are still a lot of doubting Thomases among us today. Sadly our Lord still has a lot of fair-weather friends and fickle-minded followers. We too want success before we trust. How easy it is for our sinful nature to say, *“As soon as I get my problems sorted out, I’ll come to church and make time for God’s Word.”* In other words, as soon as I have some success in my life, then I’ll put my Easter faith into practice. *“As soon as I get my bills paid, as soon as I get help for my rent, as soon as the children get a little older, then I’ll*

be ready to come and listen to Jesus.” There are others among us who are like Thomas who want to see before they believe. How easy it is for our sinful nature to ask, “I just don’t understand why there is so much trouble in the world if God really exists and is in control of everything? Why does God let so many innocent people die at the hands of wicked and violent people? Why does God let so many unborn babies die in the womb? I don’t understand why God doesn’t answer my prayers sooner or in a more obvious manner if he is really all-powerful. How can a loving God send someone to hell? Why are some saved for heaven and others condemned to hell? Why hasn’t God made his message clearer? I want to see these things. I want to know these things. I want to understand these things first. Then I’ll believe.”

God’s Definition of Faith

On this week after Easter let’s remember what Easter faith is.

- The Bible says, *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*
- Paul told the Romans, *Who hopes for what he already has? Hope that is seen is no hope at all. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*
- And to the Corinthians he said: *We fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

The essence of faith is trust in what God says no matter what our experience or emotions may tell us. Faith is trust in God even before you have success and even though you can’t see the end result. Faith is to believe something is true even though it hasn’t happened yet and even though we haven’t yet seen it.

Faith is...

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

- Faith is the person who can’t pay their bills, but yet firmly clings to the promise of Jesus, *Don’t worry about tomorrow, your heavenly Father knows what you need.*
- Faith is the person overcome by guilt, but yet hangs on to the words and promises of Jesus, *Be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven.*
- Faith is the person dying of cancer yet clinging on to the promise of Jesus, *Because I live, you will live also.*
- Faith is the lonely and the aged remembering the words of their loving Savior, *Surely I will be with you always even to the end of the age.*
- Faith is the worried father, the tired mother, the confused child folding their hands and trusting Jesus who said, *Ask, and it will be given to you.*

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

- Faith is **not** asking God for proof. Faith is trusting that the proof is already there. The proof is the Word of God. The Word of God is more certain that the ground we stand on. Faith for you and me today is taking God at his Word. Faith is trusting what God says even more than your own feelings and more than what you see with your own eyes.

Source of Easter Faith

Where do you get such a faith as this? *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the words of Christ.*

Today our faith is strengthened by the Word of God; praise be to God. But our faith is also under attack again and again by the devil, by the unbelievers in the world around us and by our own sinful nature within us. That’s why we need God’s Word every day. Faith comes from hearing God’s Word in church every Sunday. It comes from reading our Bibles at home and studying them in Bible class. Faith comes from having the Word of God constantly in our hearts and on our minds and leading our hands and feet. Every time we open our Bible there’s Jesus, even though we can’t see him talking to us, *“Look at my hands and my feet and side. Peace be with you! Stop doubting and believe.”*

Faith doesn’t come when we give our opinion about God, but faith comes when God speaks to us and gives his opinion about us in Christ. And this is God’s opinion about us, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* When we know and trust God’s opinion about us in Christ, then we, doubting Thomases as we often are, will experience for ourselves the truth of Jesus’ words: **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.** Amen.