

1Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 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, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. AS the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called, the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon

Why do we believe? Why do we believe in a man who lived and died more than two thousand years ago? Why do we have faith that this man was more than just a man? What causes us to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was more than a prophet or rabbi? What reason do we have in following him as Lord and savior?

The number one reason most people believe in Jesus as Lord is because their parents believe. At the surface, this may seem like a poor reason to believe in something so significant. But let's take a step back for a moment.

Have you seen the insurance commercial where that husband slowly, over 30 seconds, becomes like his mother. He begins to wear clothes from the 80's, a jacket with padded shoulder, glasses with beaded chain attached. His voice begins to get higher and talking as if he was of a different generation. What is funny about the commercial is that it takes a reality of life to an extreme. The truth is, most of us mature and take on traits like our parents. We all have those moments in childhood where we think, I'm never going to be like them. But then we grow older and find ourselves becoming more and more like them. Nature and nurture collide within us and at some point we find comfort and identity within the best of what our parents shared with us. I believe this is true for our faith as well.

Often our parents have been the greatest examples of faith that we have seen. Their practices of worship and Bible study, their example of prayer and of turning to God in grief or challenge. These examples are, for many of us, the primary reason we start to believe, because faith was important for them, maybe, just maybe they were right about this.

But at some point we also have to make a personal choice about faith. It is not enough for us to go through life only doing what our parents told us was good for us to do. At some point we have to make our faith our own. At some point we have to take Jesus seriously in our own life. For some, this moment is one that comes from the outside, a life event that pushes us to consider for the first time or to reconsider just what it is we believe in.

This could be a joy or a crisis of life. Getting engaged or having your first child might be examples of joy while struggling with a broken relationship or the grief of death might be examples of crisis. Life has a way of forcing and focusing us on questions of faith, what we believe, and we hold on to.

Today is confirmation Sunday, a day where our youth have an opportunity to formally confirm the faith that their parents shared with them. In baptism, the parents were able to stand with their babies in arm and confirm the faith that they would raise their child in. But the baby was only able to do what babies do, cry or sleep, wiggle, or suck a pacifier.

But today, after time in study and discussion around the Bible and Jesus, around our theology and our beliefs, two of our youth are ready to confirm that faith now for themselves.

I love Confirmation Sunday, partially because of the joy of seeing a young person come into their own faith, maybe for the first time considering what they believe and how their faith affects their life. I also love it because it is an opportunity for all of us who say we believe to look again at our own faith, to consider exactly what it is that we believe and to commit ourselves to learning more.

Thomas often gets a bad rap for having to see and touch Jesus in order that he might believe. But the truth is, every other disciple already got to see Jesus so that they could believe. They all had questions, some doubts, and some moments where they were not clear about what to believe. I believe that we too may have questions, some doubts, and moments where our faith is unclear. But we are reformed disciples and we believe in faith that seeks understanding. Not blind faith, not unwavering faith, but faith that constantly seeks understanding. In that way, every Sunday is a Confirmation Sunday for us. Every morning, every evening, and all the time between are moments of confirmation as well.

And so with joy we celebrate the faith of our young people, and we live an example of a life that is constantly confirming and reconfirming just what it is that we believe. Thanks be to God for today's faith, and the courage to seek deeper understanding.