

SERMON
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“Unbelievable”

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John 20:19-31

Most of you know that we have international students live with us. About 2 years ago, we had a young 15 year old boy from Spain, so we had two teenage boys in our house, and like all teenagers, they thought that they knew everything. They were both very smart, and very interested in science, technology, and of course, interesting information on Youtube. They loved to find unusual facts that maybe, just perhaps the other one wouldn't know. It was kind of a game that teenagers like to play. It was not uncommon for our dinner table conversation to become a debate over 'what if' or 'yes but'. At some point, someone would probably grab for a cell phone and say "OK Google"

Me? I didn't get it. I find it all very hard to believe. It's not that I didn't trust them or believe it to be true – it's more that I just didn't know the truth of those facts. And maybe, that's how the disciples felt.

We need to put Jesus' appearance in the upper room in perspective. I am sure that the disciples had seen people crucified before. It was a common form of punishment in those times. They knew for sure that there was no way you could survive such a death. It just wasn't something they could believe was possible, even though Jesus had warned them that this would happen. Matthew 17:25 says Jesus spoke to his disciples saying:

“The son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.”

Still, it was unbelievable.

When the Mary Magdalene came to the disciples and told them that she had seen Jesus ... alive ... risen from the dead. How Jesus had actually spoken to her. Still, it was unbelievable.

It may be because she was a woman, and the status of women in that time was very low. Women weren't really listened to or held in high esteem. Law courts in that day would not recognize the testimony of women and yet Jesus, who frequently went against the social norm, chose to appear to women first. But when Mary came to tell the disciples to tell them what she had seen, instead of rejoicing, they chose not to believe her. The writer of John does not tell us what the disciples response was to Mary, but the writer of Luke's gospel tells us that the disciples response to the women was:

“Their words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

They chose to hide in fear, behind locked doors. Afraid of what the Jewish authorities might do to them if they were caught. And this is where we find them at the beginning of our reading today. Verse 19 says:

“The disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.”

Hiding in fear. Clearly, they just didn't believe that Jesus was alive.

It was unbelievable.

It wasn't until Jesus was standing among them, that they began to believe. Interestingly the writer of Luke's gospel tells us that even when Jesus appeared, the disciples were startled and terrified, and they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus had to show them the marks in his hands to prove that it was really him, –only then they believed! Only then, in verse 20 it tells us that they were "overjoyed". Luke tells us that in their joy, they still were wondering and disbelieving.

So why does the church give Thomas such a hard time? Why do we call him doubting Thomas, when clearly all the disciples had doubted? I can identify with Thomas. I imagine that when the other disciples told him what they had seen, he wanted to believe, but it was just unbelievable. He just couldn't be sure. It's like some of the dinner conversations that we have in in our house – or the interesting animal facts that I shared - we want to believe them, but we are not sure if they are true. Maybe we feel that we need proof. We are tempted to grab the phone and say "OK Google..."

There was no google for Thomas. To be sure that Jesus had really risen from the dead, he wanted to see him. *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put his fingers where the nails were, and put his hand into Jesus' side"* where the spear had torn his flesh. .. Otherwise, he says in verse 25, *"I will not believe it"*

Really Thomas was just like the others. The resurrection was unbelievable.

Really Thomas was just like us.

In this day and age, we want to be fully informed. We have technology at our finger tips to make informed decisions. We want to make a reasonable decision based on the accuracy of information that we are told. My 15 year old son always wants to gather all the facts and weigh up the pros and cons, before he will ever admit that I, his mother, could be right! Or that it could possibly be believable. Perhaps some of you here are the same? Always sure that you're right. Always sure that you can prove it. Always a little bit like Thomas.

And what if, once you've gathered all the information, then you still don't understand it. Sometimes the hesitancy to believe in something is more a product of what we do know, rather than what we don't know. We know that science says this or that, so how can something contrary to those facts be true? We've seen it on Youtube, but we still don't believe it. Sometimes seeing isn't always believing! Jesus said in verse 29:

"blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

That's where faith comes in. There may be parts of the bible that are unbelievable. There may be parts that are just a metaphorical story. There may be parts that we don't understand. There may be parts that cause us to doubt, just like Thomas. And we might be scared like the disciples and Thomas. We might feel a need to prove it somehow. But it's only when you believe it, when you live out your faith, only then can you prove the truth that Jesus is alive. It's interesting that Thomas actually makes his profession that he believed saying:

"my Lord and my God," without actually taking up Jesus' offer to touch his wounds. Thomas chose to believe. He is not a character to be ridiculed because of his doubt, Thomas is a hero who used doubt carefully and ends up believing.

What about you? Are you ready to give up those niggling doubts? Are you ready to look past the things that you can't believe or understand? We know that to commit ourselves to believing in Christ may take decisions out of our hands and put them in the hands of the Divine. We know that putting things in God's hands may risk being called to do things that we personally would rather not do. We know it is scary, and sometimes that is what causes us to doubt. Sometimes that's what causes us to fear, just like the disciples, sometimes we want to stay in the locked rooms of our comfy lives. Sometimes it is easier to say that "it's unbelievable" than to take that leap in faith.

Jesus knew how difficult it would be to believe – that is why he gave us the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples – the same Holy Spirit that can be your guide to help you through those moments of disbelief.

If you take that leap of faith and allow yourself to believe in things you that you can't always understand; if you willing to risk believing in the unbelievable, you are not alone. The Holy Spirit will work in your life. And, Jesus also gave his disciples the promise that we have still today – the promise that, "peace will be with you."

Amen.