

First Presbyterian Church
Rev. Drew Harrison

2nd Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31
April 23, 2017

Put Your Hand in My Hand

There are two ways to look at the story of doubting Thomas. If you look at the story of doubting Thomas from the perspective of after the knowledge of resurrection, it can become a story of what not to do: Don't be a doubting Thomas, as they say. Thomas should have believed when he heard from those who had witnessed Jesus at the empty tomb.

Thomas didn't believe when he should have, and he was wrong, so we should believe. That's the moral of the story. And the solution to the conflict presented in that narrative is to believe. And it makes a lot of sense for the people of John's early audience, who had likely been thrown out of the synagogue for believing, to read this story in a way that celebrates the crucial importance of belief. It would have been affirming for them, to hear that belief even when you have not seen is so important.

I'll be honest with you, that doesn't really work for me.

I can't help but identify with Thomas in the story. When I read the story of doubting Thomas, I find it hard to see in Thomas an example of what not to do, some fellow who learned his lesson—that is, not to ask too many questions. On the contrary, I read the story of doubting Thomas, and I think, "Thank God *someone* said it."

For many of us, doubt serves an essential purpose—it protects us from believing things that aren't true.

Is the story of doubting Thomas a story of doubt, or a story of faith? In a sense, it tries to have its cake and eat it too. Thomas's doubts are removed when he sees and touches Jesus. The reasonable doubter receives reassurances. But the moral of the story, given in the form of a Beatitude, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believed" implies that Thomas is wrong for doubting, and that it is those who believed without evidence who are the story's heroes. So the story gets it both ways. To any who doubt, here is evidence to quail your fears. Here is an explicit witness of the physical, embodied resurrection. To those without doubts, the story affirms your faith as the better option.

If the story were purely to reaffirm those who already believe, we would expect the story not to go to such pains to prove Jesus' physicality.

The story of doubting Thomas is simultaneously something to reassure our doubts and something with which to proclaim that our doubts do not need assurances.