

Peace Be with You

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Scripture: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ 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."²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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."²⁷ 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."²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ 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."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ 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.

There was a time when my dad wanted me to learn a few lessons on appreciating all that I had in America and the blessings I had compared to when he grew up. He told me of walking to and from school each day, taking over two hours round trip. Rain, snow, or shine, he would make that long trip every school day.

Well, I believed him at first, because I had always believed what he said when I was young. But as I got older, I started to doubt his story because I was told by my friends how their dads told them the same kind of story of walking up large hills and how easy and wonderful we have it today.

Well, then I asked my dad if he had really walked over an hour one way to school, over large hills, no matter the weather. He looked at me if I were kidding. He noticed I was not. And he said that he surely did.

Well years later, I was only somewhat convinced he really did. And at the age of 21, my family took a two-week trip to Korea. That was my first time back to Korea since my family moved to Michigan in 1974. During that trip, the main event was to meet my grandmother, the only living grandparent I had ever known, having met her only once when I was very young and she visited us when we were living in Waterford. I remember her waking me up early in the morning and testing my strength by telling me to squeeze her hand as hard as I could. She wanted to know if I could get up and get to work right away, as they did on the farm. Well, I hardly could since I did not grow up on a farm. But it was a farm that I saw when I arrived at my grandmother's home where my father grew up.

As I was soaking in all the humble and rural surroundings, my father pointed and told me to look a certain direction; and there was what I saw looked like a mountain. Then he said that every day, he walked over that large hill to go to school. So even when he told me that, I laughed inside because even as a strong and athletic 21-year-old, I was intimidated by such a trek. It looked more like two miles rather than one just to get to the

peak of the mountain. This is the first thing he did because he knew I doubted his story. Remember, having grown up in Michigan, I hardly saw anything like a mountain. It was not until Jamie and I traveled to the Grand Canyon that I realized how grand one part of God's creation is. I learned that in Korea, people took all-day trips to the mountains which made the seemingly grand mountain my dad pointed at more like a large hill.

Anyway, I still doubted my dad and asked, "Dad, your telling me you walked over that gigantic hill every day to school?" He said he did. I wanted to ask my grandma to see if he actually did. But I thought I would take a look around first. It was easy to see the surrounding flat farmland and not a school was not in sight, only houses, small barns, and lots of land for farming. So, no matter if the school was over the mountain or not, it was a far walk. And interestingly, though the children now took buses to school, I looked again and more carefully at what my dad called the large hill, and I noticed a small line that zigzagged up to the peak, the path people took even to this day. Then I believed what my dad told me back when I was only 7 or 8 years old.

Just think, if I had never traveled to Korea, if my dad did not save up for the entire family to make a trip all together to visit with relatives who I had never met before, then I would not have believed what my father told me, even to this day.

Though I know my dad can exaggerate sometimes, I do not doubt when he speaks of his childhood and of the stories that seem hard to believe, especially those of hardships and trials.

I believe he did not want us, his children, to have to go through the same and thus moved to this land that we have come to love and call our home.

The funny thing about my dad talking about his walks to school that he was not exaggerating, but in fact, in my opinion, understating his walks to school as a child.

Doubt is natural. In fact, if we had no doubts about anything that anyone said, then we may be labeled more as gullible rather than trusting.

God gave us the ability to reason, formulate and use logic, and to gain wisdom from experience. Yet, though we have been given such gifts of reason and logic, we are not to rely or place so much faith totally in our God-given abilities that we look our faith in the very One who gave us everything, from our very life to our salvation.

Doubt can, at times, even help our faith grow stronger, as it did in my relationship with my father. He could have gotten upset or reprimanded me for not believing what he said. But he had the patience and a plan to show me when I was old enough and when we had the opportunity to go to Korea together, a once in a lifetime all family trip.

When we come to the time, soon after Jesus rose from the dead when Scripture tells us that the first people he shows himself to are his disciples and other close followers.

However, though some of the disciples believed, or at least wanted to believe in Mary Magdalene's testimony of meeting Jesus and being instructed to tell his disciples to gather and wait for him, there were a few who did not believe. They showed their doubts by not showing up.

Thomas, the one referred to as doubting Thomas, did not show up at the first appearance of Christ. We know this story so well. Can you imagine the other disciples, who had just seen Jesus, running to Thomas, and telling them with shouts of joy and uncontrollable excitement that Jesus was indeed back from the dead?

You would think that he would have instantly believed. But he did not. He did not share in their excitement, but basically said that that he had to see him. More than that, said something like, “I not only have to see and touch him, but in order to believe he is back, I need to put my finger through the holes in his hands from the nails and put my hand in the scar in his side from the spear that pierced him.

For Thomas, and most people in Judea, **it was easier to doubt** that Jesus had risen from the dead than to believe in what others said about Jesus appearing to them.

Jesus could have appeared the very moment Thomas doubted and said such things about needing absolute proof for himself. But Jesus waited a full week before appearing again to his disciples. Do not ask me why he did that. I do not really know. I also do not know why he appeared as many times as he did and to as many people as he did. But I do believe he did rise from the dead and show himself to thousands.

I am quite sure that Thomas went to that next meeting, behind closed and locked doors, not because he really believed, but because he wanted to believe.

His doubt was so strong that when Jesus did appear before him, Thomas did not immediately bow down and worship Christ, his risen Lord. Well, maybe because he was in shock, he did not immediately react. But he in fact was saying what was in his heart; that he could not believe until he actually touched Jesus’ hands and scar. And Jesus told him to touch his nail-pierced hands and scar on his side.

This tells us a lot about human nature, our nature. It also tells us a lot about God.

Even today, it is easier for many to doubt than to believe that Christ rose from the dead. Even though by historical accounts there is little doubt that the person, Jesus, existed and that he was crucified. There is much doubt in him being the Son of God and that was dead for three days and came back to life.

Though it is easier to doubt Christ’s resurrection, we find that Jesus is not only patient, even with those who were closest to him, he is also lovingly patient with all of his creation.

Today, we also heard from the book of Acts. Jesus was lovingly patient with Peter, who denied three times that he even knew Jesus when Jesus was arrested and awaiting trial. Yet this Peter was the one Jesus appointed as the main leader for his church and was sent to speak to everyone he could about the amazing grace and story of salvation in Christ.

Peter went to everyone, even to the very people who wanted Jesus arrested and crucified. He went to those who doubted because it was much easier for them to doubt. For if they believed, they knew they would face persecution, ridicule, imprisonment, and even death as Christ’s followers.

But what happened? Many did believe in Peter’s testimony, even those who had yelled, “Crucify! Crucify!” They believed because Peter’s testimony was not only convincing, but life changing and lifesaving. For when one speaks of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not your power that works, but God. In Romans 1:16 Paul says, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”**

Today, we are among those about whom Jesus said, “...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

Returning to the story of me doubting my father’s far and difficult trips to school, I realize that I had a hard time believing him because his matter-of-fact approach to telling me of his walks to school (that was just how he told stories and did not brag) and because of what others said to me of how their fathers said the very same thing. So, it was easier for me to doubt than to believe in what he said.

But I place no blame on my father or my friends for my doubts. However, my doubt became faith when I saw what my dad was talking about. We do not get the chance to see for ourselves the things we take by faith. But how life changes when we believe and not doubt.

Thomas' doubt was slowly turned into faith after he witnessed the other disciples' great excitement. He at least showed up to the next meeting.

And Jesus was gracious to Thomas, not only appearing and speaking to him, but to also allowing Thomas to touch his wounds. And because Jesus allowed him to do so, Thomas allowed his heart and soul to be touched by Christ. You know that Thomas was one of the most faithful and passionate disciples after that.

No matter the reasons that make it easier to doubt, tell Christ what is on your heart, especially your doubts. Let Christ, in his time and his way, grant you such graciousness and show himself to you.

For when you do meet the risen Lord, your daily walk in life will be one that has purpose, joy, freedom, and a living message of hope and salvation.

And as you leave this sanctuary this day, ask yourself these two questions. First, do I truly believe in the resurrection of Christ? This is an easy answer for most all of us, because if you did not believe you would not be here. Second, is my faith so strong that my life shares the Good News of Christ to others through my words and actions, so that others, especially those with doubts, may be convinced enough to want to encounter Christ the risen Lord themselves?

I pray it is so. Amen.