

6th October 2024

20th Sunday After Pentecost

Thanksgiving for the Apostle Thomas, whose faith was turned to Faith Whose Doubt

Job.42.1-6
Psalm.40.1-5
1Pet.3.1-9
John.20.24-29

Key Verse: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."
(John 20:29)

Beloved in Christ, today we gather to reflect on a profound aspect of our faith that is often overlooked: the journey from doubt to faith. As we commemorate the Apostle Thomas, often remembered for his scepticism, we will explore how his doubt transformed into a deep, unwavering faith. Our readings today, from the Book of Job, the Psalms, the First Epistle of Peter, and the Gospel of John, illuminate this theme beautifully. Doubt is a universal experience; we all encounter moments when our faith is challenged, whether due to life's hardships, unanswered prayers, or the mysteries of our existence. In these moments, we can find encouragement and inspiration through the life of Thomas and the biblical accounts we will consider. Let us delve into our scripture readings and discover how doubt can indeed lead to a deeper understanding and experience of faith.

I. The Assurance of God's Sovereignty (Job 42:1-6)

In our first reading from Job, we witness a powerful culmination of Job's journey through suffering and doubt. After enduring immense loss and despair, Job encounters God in a profound way. In Job 42:1-6, we read: "Then Job answered the Lord: 'I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, "Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, too wonderful for me to know. You said, "Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me." My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'" Here, Job acknowledges the sovereignty of God. His initial questions and doubts are met with divine revelation, leading him to a place of repentance and humility. This transformation from doubt to faith illustrates that questioning can ultimately lead us to a deeper relationship with God. Consider a young child who, faced with a daunting challenge, expresses doubt in their abilities. But when encouraged and guided through the challenge, they often emerge not just successful but with newfound confidence. Similarly, Job's journey shows that through our doubts and struggles, we can come to know God more intimately.

II. The Testimony of God's Faithfulness (Psalm 40:1-5)

Our Psalm today reinforces this theme of thanksgiving and the acknowledgment of God's faithfulness. In Psalm 40:1-5, we hear: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare." The psalmist speaks from a place of gratitude, recognizing that God has been a source of help and deliverance. When we reflect on our doubts and fears, we can also recall instances where God has faithfully walked with us, transforming our struggles into testimonies of His goodness. Think about the moments in your life where you have faced uncertainty or doubt. Did you not experience a glimmer of God's faithfulness during those times? Just as the psalmist notes the wonders of God, our lives are filled with testimonies of God's faithfulness, which can turn our doubt into praise.

III. The Call to Live Out Our Faith (1 Peter 3:1-9)

In the Epistle of 1 Peter, we find a call to live out our faith in a way that reflects Christ's love. Peter encourages believers to be prepared to give an answer for their hope. In 1 Peter 3:1-9, we read: "Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect... Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." This passage reminds us that our actions can serve as a testament to our faith, even in the face of doubt. Living out our faith through love, compassion, and humility can create an environment where doubt can be addressed and transformed. Consider a community facing division or conflict. When individuals choose to respond with love and grace rather than anger or resentment, it can lead to reconciliation and healing. Our faith is not only expressed in our beliefs but also in our actions, which can draw others toward Christ.

IV. The Transformation of Doubt to Faith (John 20:24-29)

Finally, we arrive at the Gospel of John, where we find the account of Thomas, who is often labelled "Doubting Thomas." In John 20:24-29, we read: "Now Thomas (also known as 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.' A week later his disciples were in the house again,

and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" In this passage, we witness Thomas's transformation from doubt to belief. When Jesus appears, he invites Thomas to examine His wounds, providing a tangible answer to Thomas's scepticism. This moment not only affirms Thomas's faith but also serves as a reminder that doubt is not the end of the journey; it can be a stepping stone to a deeper relationship with God. Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it can be a catalyst for growth. When we allow ourselves to confront our doubts, we may find the assurance and evidence we need to believe more deeply. Just as Thomas's encounter with Jesus transformed him, our encounters with Christ can transform our doubts into faith. The Apostle Thomas, often referred to as "Doubting Thomas," is a significant figure in the New Testament, particularly known for his initial scepticism regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Here are some key points about his life and role in the early Christian community:

1. Identity and Background

- **Name:** Thomas is also known by the Aramaic name "Didymus," which means "twin." The Bible does not provide much detail about his family or background.
- **Disciple of Jesus:** He was one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus, and he played a crucial role in the ministry of Christ.

2. Personality Traits

- **Sceptical Yet Loyal:** Thomas is often characterized as sceptical due to his doubt regarding Jesus' resurrection. However, he is also portrayed as a loyal and committed follower. For example, in John 11:16, when Jesus decides to return to Judea, Thomas expresses his willingness to go with Him, even if it means facing death.

3. The Resurrection Encounter

- **Doubt and Faith:** The most notable story associated with Thomas is found in John 20:24-29. After Jesus' resurrection, he appears to the other disciples, but Thomas is not present. When they tell him about the risen Christ, he responds with scepticism, insisting that he will not believe until he sees Jesus' wounds. When Jesus later appears and invites Thomas to touch His wounds, Thomas responds with a profound declaration of faith: "My Lord and my God!" This moment marks a significant transition for Thomas from doubt to belief.

4. Theological Significance

- **Blessed are Those Who Believe:** Jesus' response to Thomas highlights an important theological theme in Christianity: faith without sight. He says,

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." This encourages believers to have faith based on trust and conviction rather than physical evidence.

- **Symbol of Doubt:** Thomas represents the struggle with faith that many believers face. His story resonates with those who doubt, offering assurance that questioning and seeking are part of the faith journey.

5. Legacy

- **Apostolic Mission:** According to tradition, Thomas travelled to India to spread the gospel, where he is credited with founding the Church of the Thomas Christians, also known as the Syrian Christians. His missionary work had a lasting impact, and he is venerated as a saint in various Christian denominations.
- **Feast Day:** In the Western Church, Thomas is celebrated on July 3, while in the Eastern Orthodox Church, his feast is observed on the first Sunday after Pascha (Easter).

6. Encouragement for Believers

- **Embracing Doubt:** The story of Thomas encourages Christians that doubt can be a pathway to deeper faith. His initial scepticism did not disqualify him from being an apostle; instead, it highlighted the transformative power of encountering Christ.
- **Hope for the Doubtful:** For those who find themselves struggling with belief, Thomas serves as a reminder that God meets us in our doubts and desires for us to seek understanding and faith.

In summary, Apostle Thomas' journey from doubt to faith exemplifies the struggles many face in their spiritual lives. His story encourages us to embrace our questions, seek encounters with the divine, and ultimately find our faith strengthened through those experiences.

Conclusion

As we reflect on the life of Thomas, we are reminded that doubt is a natural part of our faith journey. Just as Job discovered God's sovereignty, the psalmist celebrated God's faithfulness, and Peter encouraged us to live out our faith, Thomas's story shows us that our doubts can lead to profound faith. In our own lives, let us not shy away from our doubts but bring them to God, trusting that He will meet us in our questioning. May we echo Thomas's declaration, "My Lord and my God," as we deepen our faith through the assurance of Christ's presence. As we conclude today's sermon, let us pray together:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of faith and the examples of those who have gone before us. Thank You for the Apostle Thomas and the way his doubt led to a profound affirmation of faith. Help us to bring our doubts before You, knowing that You are a God who meets us in our uncertainty. Strengthen our hearts, encourage our spirits, and deepen our faith as we seek to follow You more closely. May we be filled with gratitude for Your faithfulness in our lives, and may we share the hope we have in You with others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.