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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
2nd Sunday of Easter/Year A
April 20, 2017
Text: John 20:19-31

“Hand Me Down Faith”

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Last Sunday as my way home from church and taking my mother communion, I had a conversation with myself as I sometimes do after Sunday Eucharist. Rewinding the tape I usually ask: Who was at church? Who wasn't? Was there something that was read or sung or shared that might have really spoken to someone's spirit? To my spirit? Was the sermon a help to anyone? Do I myself believe what I proclaimed?

Well, driving along Howdershell, I suddenly wondered how many people grapple with the whole notion of Easter. Specifically-Jesus' resurrection? I shared with those at bible study Tuesday evening that while I get excited about Easter, I wondered if there were others as equally excited. Or were there people in the pews here and elsewhere who have a hard time believing it? Are there others who struggle with the Easter message? Is it possible that belief and doubt can coexist? Is it okay that there are times when our faith wavers?

One thing is for sure that this whole faith thing is not the same for everyone. Just as we are all uniquely made in God's image, our faith journeys differ. That is not a bad thing because we are all individuals and at different points in our lives. And the truth of the matter is that we all have our moments when we question, even doubt, yet Jesus meets people where they are. Today's wonderful Gospel on this Second Sunday of Easter makes this clear.

John tells us that it was evening on that same day and the disciples were huddled together behind lock doors “for fear of the Jews.” The last few days had been ugly. The Jewish authorities had succeeded in making sure that Jesus was apprehended by the Romans and killed on a cross. Guards had been placed outside his tomb so that no one could steal Jesus' body and make false claims. The disciples hid themselves in a darkened

house in fear for their lives knowing that what happened to Jesus could very well happen to them.

But had they not heard and understood what Mary Magdalene had told them only a few hours earlier? Didn't they believe her when she told them that she had seen the Lord? Hadn't Peter and the other disciple come back and tell what they observed? Jesus' burial wrappings were neatly placed in a pile. And the tomb was empty!

Still, late that evening Jesus suddenly came and stood among them and they saw the risen Lord themselves. He spoke peace into their fears and showed them his hands and his side and breathed on them the Holy Spirit and bestowed on them the power to forgive sins. And he told them that he is sending them out into the world to be his hands and his feet.

This is a wonderful story of the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples but that would not be his only appearance for Thomas was not there. When Thomas later came to where they were they echoed the words of Mary Magdalene: "We have seen the Lord!" But no matter how hard they tried to convince him, Thomas would not be swayed. Thomas said, "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." Thomas was not content with what he just heard. He wanted flesh and bones. He wanted the nail prints. He wanted proof.

Now, we cannot fault Thomas for saying this, can we? If we had been in his sandals, wouldn't we have said the same thing? Wouldn't we have asked for proof? Which of us wouldn't have felt cheated or slighted, like Thomas did, for having missed seeing Jesus, a resurrected Jesus, standing among his friends?

Yet every Second Sunday of Easter, Thomas gets a bum rap and is labeled "Thomas the Doubter". Yet Thomas is no different than any of us who want to see something for ourselves before we decide whether or not a thing is true.

Jesus did come again a week later and this time Thomas was there. Jesus invited him to see the marks and to touch his wounds. "Do not doubt but believe." Jesus told him. Thomas had only but to see and he believed.

This passage concludes with the words, “*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.*”

Here we are some 2,000 years later. We have before us these scriptures so that we might hear them and ponder them in order that we might also believe without seeing with our eyes. Even if that means that sometimes we find ourselves wrestling with doubt and belief. Our faith wavers. Who among us has not had moments of doubt, of crisis in faith? It is okay. Our doubts go hand in hand with our abilities to believe, with the faith we so long for.

The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples, despite their locked doors, to show them that he lived and that he still loved them. He came to them, despite their fears and unbelief, and offered them his gift of peace. Never did he chide them or admonish them for their lack of faith. And to Thomas who needed proof, he offered himself and love. If they can be forgiven and loved and sent despite their unbelief and questions, so can all of us.

You and I live in a time when all sorts of stuff is put out there. Lately we’ve been using phrases like “alternative truths” and “fake news”. We often caution folks about what they read on the internet because many of us know that just because something is posted on the internet doesn’t mean that that information is always true.

But *these* testimonies have been handed down to us who follow the Christ. As Christians we believe that Jesus walks hand and hand with us on this journey of faith. He invites us to know in our hearts that which has been handed down to us.

We are to testify to these truth truths that Jesus was born, that he died, that he rose, and will come again. Like his disciples, we are charged to be his hands and feet in the world.

That the world might come to know the risen Christ.

That all may have life in his name.

That every tongue will join us in our song: He lives! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.