



Sunday's Sermon

Sunday April 19, 2020

First Lesson: Psalm 16

Gospel Lesson: John 20: 19-31

Sermon Title: "Where is the Good News?: Doubt."

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

"Doubting Thomas" Song Lyrics: Nickel Creek

*What will be left when I've drawn my last breath
Besides the folks I've met and the folks who know me
Will I discover a soul saving love or
Just the dirt above and below me?
I'm a doubting Thomas
I took a promise
I do not feel safe
O' me of little faith
Sometimes I pray for a slap in the face
Then I beg to be spared cause I'm a coward
If there's a master of death I bet he's holding his breath
Cause I show the blind and tell the deaf
About his power
I'm a doubting Thomas
I can't keep my promises
Cause I don't know what's safe
O' me of little faith
Can I be used to help others find truth
When I'm scared that I'll find proof that it's a lie
Can I be led down a trail dropping bread crumbs
To prove I'm not ready to die
Please give me time to decipher the signs
Please forgive me for time that I've wasted
I'm a doubting Thomas
I'll take your promise
Though I know nothing's safe
O' me of little faith
O' me of little faith*

We are continuing in our "Where is the good news series;

finding the good news in less than ideal circumstances,” and this week, we are focused on finding the good news when there is doubt.

And what better way to look at doubt, than through the eyes of disciple Thomas in our gospel today, who did not entirely believe that Jesus’ resurrection occurred.

So essentially church family, last week when I was inviting you and I to consider our response to the empty tomb; Thomas’s response to all of this was **doubt**.

Thomas in verse 25 of the latter portion of this scriptural sentence said in my NRSV translation; that “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.”

And I don’t know about you, but out of all of the biblical characters that I have ever engaged within the Holy scriptures, this is probably the most relatable disciple for me...**the one who has expressed doubt.**

For in these trying times, I have found myself oscillating between a measure of strong faith and doubt; day to day; sometimes even hour to hour.

I have found myself crying out of frustration in one instance to be followed by a wave of assurance in the next.

So doubt from my perspective is not suggesting that you and I are not strong in our faith;

On the contrary **doubt for me** is a sign that you and I are **still growing and learning in our faith.**

So I stopped by to say that **having doubt** is a normal part of our Christian journey.

Now the question becomes then, where is the good news in all that I have shared?

Well let’s dig a little deeper to see what we might find shall we?

So looking at our first lesson, I believe our goal is to get to this place of assurance that all will be well in Psalm 16.

However, before considering how you and might achieve this confidence expressed in Psalm 16, I think it is important to spend some time fleshing out where I would suspect a lot of us have been in or are in.....which is in the place of doubt as Thomas aka doubting Thomas is expressing....especially in the current times we are in; where banks are running out of money; the death toll is still rising and face to face communication is postponed in some parts of our country through the summer; as an example, I believe that New Jersey has stated that large social gatherings would likely be prohibited through 2021....

So the question becomes, where is the good news in the doubt that both you and I might be experiencing?

The good news lies, I would suspect in our first lesson Psalm 16; that in spite of our circumstances and what you and I might be enduring or the world might be enduring; is this idea **that it is possible for you and I to get to a place of assurance....**

You see looking briefly at Psalm 16, when the assumed writer David said **Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust:** It seems that David wrote this Psalm from a time of trouble, **But even in** David's time of trouble, he still possessed the faith, fortitude or wisdom (you get to explore what his source of strength is for yourself) to ask for preservation and then he took confidence in some kind of resurrection (Psalm 16:10). In simpler terms, David somehow came to a spiritual place that he would be ok even if his circumstances revealed otherwise.... Now did David get to this place of assurance over night....no. Church, it took some time for David to reach this point in his life and in his faith journey of assurance; **but the good news is that he did get there...**

And the good news **is that you and I can get there also...** For faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (hebrews 11:1)

But perhaps it is in our times of doubt, that you and I might begin to explore and formulate a spiritual plan for ourselves to help guide us to get there.

And part of how this spiritual plan begins to develop within ourselves, is by taking the first step in naming those struggles, doubts and fears that might be hindering our paths to be able to truly see and believe in a resurrection of our present circumstances and in the life eternal.

And so this sermon today is designed to begin to plant seeds of exploration of how you and might get there; of how you and I might get to a place of optimism; of how you and I might get to a place of assurance that God is not just an observer; but instead is amongst us, guiding our perspectives and our movements to the light where hope, faith and resiliency lies and awaits...

And I thought it might be creative, relevant and life-giving to start with our theological journey, by considering the words of our Praise and Worship minister, who brought me this song that has become a life-giving source for me to feed off of; "Doubting Thomas by Nickel Creek;" in which the lyrics I am about to delve further into, is truly a sermon all by itself.

And to give some background of who Nickel Creek is; **Nickel Creek** (formerly known as the **Nickel Creek Band**) is an American Americana music group consisting of Chris Thile (mandolin), and siblings Sara Watkins (fiddle) and Sean Watkins (guitar). Formed in 1989 in Southern California, they released six albums between 1993 and 2006.

And so church, I believe that by us engaging the lyrics of this song, along with critically engaging our gospel of Thomas; that perhaps seeds of assurance in our faith might be planted, restored or renewed....

And so there are a number of themes that this song reveals out of Thomas's story which I will reiterate is another perspective of

Thomas the disciple, but it is a perspective that I deeply resonate with.

And so the first few verses of the song that Mike beautifully and passionately sang started off with ; **What will be left when I've drawn my last breath, Besides the folks I've met and the folks who know me, Will I discover a soul saving love or Just the dirt above and below me?**

And so for me this first set of lyrics emerges the theme of salvation and resurrection...

For on Ash Wednesday that occurred weeks away, most of you participated in the ceremony of ashes, where myself or Matt anointed your heads with a symbol of the cross, followed by the words *from dust you came, from dust you shall return.*

But getting back to the song that was sung, Nickel from my theological perspective was essentially asking the question, "when I die, in the end, is dust all there will be?"

He was asking from the lens of Thomas, will I only be recognized and known by those who knew me above the dirt, or will there truly be a Jesus that will recognize me when I pass on?

The next set of lyrics that I will go to as I will save the chorus lyrics for last that says, **Sometimes I pray for a slap in the face, Then I beg to be spared cause I'm a coward, If there's a master of death I bet he's holding his breath, Cause I show the blind and tell the deaf**

About his power

And if I can be transparent with you this morning without judgment, these lyrics causes me to reflect on the fact that I have felt like a coward often throughout this pandemic crisis.

For most of my tears have been surrounding this fear of me not wanting my husband to die or my children to die or those that I deeply love to die; not to mention every tickle in my throat, runny nose, watery eye or occasional cough that I have had, even if it is to just clear my throat; I find myself stricken with fear; sitting up stiff as a board at night, just in case breathing gets labored or difficult; or checking my husbands forehead with the back of my head or touching my children to make sure that they are cool to the touch;

And then somehow I have to pull it all together enough by Sunday morning to put on my game face and preach the Word of God...and church I am not preaching any of this for you to feel sorry for me or even comfort me; but to be vulnerable with you so testify that doubt is real... and that doubt is equal opportunistic...

The last set of lyrics before I get to the chorus says **Can I be used to help others find truth, When I'm scared that I'll find proof that it's a lie, Can I be led down a trail dropping bread crumbs, To prove I'm not ready to die, Please give me time to decipher the signs, Please forgive me for time that I've wasted**

And for me, these set of the lyrics I believe is the epitome of what

lies behind the doubt of not just Thomas, but many of us and that is, what if all of this is a lie?

What if the Triune God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is a fairy tale that we just tell ourselves to get by?

Furthermore, if I have had this thought and you have had this thought, then how on earth are we supposed to make disciples of Jesus Christ with having such serious doubts?

And then finally the chorus of this song says

I'm a doubting Thomas

I took a promise

I do not feel safe

O' me of little faith

But the reason why I saved this main chorus for last because this has been the chorus until the very last part of the song where this same chorus evolves; making the final lyrics

I'm a doubting Thomas

I'll take your promise

Though I know nothing's safe

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So the good news in this subtle lyric change is that even in all of the doubt that Thomas expresses in this song, the song writer lets the world know that Thomas is not going to give up in his faith journey.

The evolution of these lyrics tells the worlds that Thomas is going to keep looking to have a closer relationship with Jesus....

And the good news as I place these lyrics within this gospel, is that as Thomas keeps looking for the metamorphic signs of Jesus wounds...Jesus teaches us that if we ask, Jesus will show us them...Hallelujah...

The good news is that if you and I just hang in there in the tension of our faith and drum up the same courage that Thomas had to ask Jesus for proof of his existence, Jesus will show us his existence.....

And the reason why we know this, is because within our gospel, Jesus had no objection to revealing his wounds to Thomas and even allowed him to touch his wounds.

And so church if we ask Jesus in our prayer and faith walk to show himself, **Jesus will show us his wounds** of injustice in the world...

Jesus will show us his markings of pain in the world;

Jesus will show up in amazing ways to let us know that **not only does he see** the oppression; **not only does he see** the evil; **not only does he see the** injustice of it all but he has lived it...because we live it...and Jesus is in this world right with us, every step of the way, guiding us all to a better way of life and love eternal.....

For looking back once again at our Easter passage in John to punctuate this message for us today;

I stated that the good news was that Mary Magdalene was able to see the gardener in the midst of all of her emotions of fear and terror that Jesus body was gone....

The biggest revelation as I add Thomas to this story of resurrection and after speaking with a number of farmers within our Nebraskan community that shared with me their working hours.

As you all probably know, farmers are some of the most hardest working individuals that I know.

For their work is tiresome. **Their work is often grueling, their work is often** stressful; **their work is often** uncertain and for farmers, their working hours are Early to bed... Early to Rise For there is So much to do and everyone starts the day hungry. **If you have livestock** they need water and food.

And If you're lucky there are natural water sources and ponds ...and the animals can start themselves..but they still have to be let out.

So farmers are out there before the day even breaks and so scripturally looking at this gardener on the scene who happens to be there in the night, the Biblical text **is not referring to a gardener** in the way you and I might think of a gardener....

The scripture is not referring to a gardener that would go out to Lowes to buy some gardening gloves and a couple of shrubs and work out on their front lawn or backyard.

The gardener in this passage is the one who was on his hands and knees in the middle of the night being tempted to throw in the towel for all of his efforts for good and justice;

The gardener in the passage was the one who was in the garden asking for this cup to pass from him;

The gardener is the one who has the same work ethic as our own farmers whom we know and love who is up before any one even thinks of rising;

So the good news church for Mary Magdalene, Thomas and all of us is just because Mary just happened to finally see the gardener there, does not mean that the gardener wasn't always there!

Just because Thomas was able to see the wounds and markings of Jesus, does not meant that Jesus wasn't always there...

So keep seeking, keep searching, keep asking all of the questions that you can think of asking God;

For God will not only answer these questions in only the way that God knows how to do so, but I stopped by to decree and declare that God is always here.....

Waiting to turn our doubts into beautiful discoveries; meanwhile cultivating our faith and confidence in God's love every step of the way.

Let the Church say Amen!

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Let the Church say Amen!

Sincerely,

Kirstie Engel
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