

April 23 2017

Reading from the Bible John 20:19-31

Sermon *“Fact Check for Thomas”*

I suppose a lot of you sit around wondering what the pastor watches on TV on Saturday afternoon. I did do yard work, you can check it out, I did do it but I had to have a little break and I happened to come across on TV, how to train a dragon. I have always a kind of wished there were dragons. I would like to have met one; I kind of think they are cool. This cartoon that I found was how to train your dragon and features a young Viking named Hiccup. Those of you who are grandparents, you know this by heart probably. And this dragon is toothless and Hiccup's father doesn't know that. His father is a Viking and he had made it his business to kill dragons. He has just come back in and in this one particular scene that I really liked is when Hiccup's toothless dragon comes in and all the Vikings get ready to pull their swords and then others put them down on the ground. And Hiccup brings in toothless and then he asks his father to come over. His father is eyeing and waiting for the other dragons and the fire and the toothless dragon. And Hiccup takes and puts his hand on the nose of the dragon and if the dragon was a cat it would purr and all of a sudden his Viking father melts and he realizes that there is another side to a dragon. I was going to tell that story anyway in church but my next door neighbor has a sign on the door, Here Be Dragons so apparently I moved into the right place.

There are a lot of things in our lives that are just a movie we can't really believe them. It is fantasy. My husband hates fantasy. He likes things that are more realistic. We watch Mission Impossible movies and he says that will never work. And we have saying with each other to see who can say it first “It's a movie”. Life is a lot like that something it seems to be too good to be true or too weird to be true. Maybe you are one of those in your circle who knows how to look up Dot Com because you have a family member who is always saying wacko things that absolutely true and you have to response to it immediately. But then they never respond back after I send back this little note that says this isn't true.

Extraordinarily claims, mass mailings warnings need to be checked out but you know fact checking isn't always that new. We have just become more highly sophisticated today.

We even find it in this story of the skeptical but courageous Thomas. In mixed reviews of the sightings of the risen Lord even the stories of the Pharisees who made up a spin why there was no body. Matthew said in his gospel, the women were afraid but were joyful and told the disciples. Mark said in his gospel that at first they didn't tell anyone because they were afraid and then they fled. Luke's

Gospel reads the other disciples looked at the women and said nonsense from emotional women crying at the tomb. In the gospels Luke and John, Peter and John go into the tomb and it is there that John believed. I am not positive that John believed that Jesus was raised from the dead because he didn't remember it. He believed the body was gone. They all wondered what happened according to the Scriptures.

Thomas, oh, Thomas unfortunately named Doubting Thomas but in reality he was a pretty faithful man. Remember that when Jesus was ready to go to Bethany when Lazarus died, Thomas was the one said don't go because they will kill him and (the rest of us) but John said let us go to Jerusalem with Jesus and die with him. That was not the most optimistic vote of approval but he was ready to go. When Jesus was saying, "Where I am going you can't go." And the disciples said, "We don't even know where you are going; how do we know how to get there?" And Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." Here we have Missouri. "Show me." Thomas was absent at the crucifixion and just about everybody who was a disciple. We know that John was there because he took charge of Mary the mother of Jesus. Thomas was absent at the burial that was Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. They were there and the women were there but none of the other disciples were mentioned. He wasn't on the road to Emmaus, which you will hear about next week from Allen. And he apparently was not there the first night; because it says Thomas wasn't with them. Just among ourselves, it wasn't just the 11 or 10 people; chances are that in that locked room there were more than just the disciples. Nobody in the Bible said the 12 or the 11 were in that room. We just know who wasn't there and that was Thomas. And we know who was there and that was Jesus. It could very well been all the women and it could have been other followers of Jesus and they had the door locked for fear of the Jews. I don't blame them because the Jews had rounded up Jesus and you know they would have started a door to door search for them. They didn't get arrested in the garden but that didn't mean they were safe. They were known, Peter was recognized in the courtyard and people knew some of the people who hung out with Jesus. The disciples feared death and the Passover was over and suddenly among them, there is Jesus. He said the familiar words Hello or Peace Be With You and this was the normal way of greeting but it would never again be the normal way of greeting again for those people. Disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. There he is He said look at my hands look at my side It is possible that he did not he might not have nail holes in his feet sometimes in cruxification they just tied the feet to the post sometimes they nailed them we don't know. And there they were overjoyed. They were not overjoyed when they first saw him because they were not quite sure what they were seeing. I have never seen anyone in a closed room come in unless there was a secret panel or something. There he was flesh and blood. They were

rejoicing. He told them he would breathe the spirit on them and they would be able to forgive or not to forgive. I think what he is saying is, they now have the power to preach the good news that I am alive, forgiveness's of sins and if you don't go at all the message is not going to be preached and if you do go you are going to give opportunity to everyone to accept that gift from God or not. It is up to you to carry this good news.

It is interesting that they were in a room with the door locked again in the next week. They were fearful of the Jews and that is an important point they gotten hold of that peace that passed understanding they were peaceful still in a locked room. And Jesus shows up and we hear he speaks directly to Thomas. He publically speaks to Thomas. Everyone heard Thomas say early on I am not going to believe it; why would I believe you this was absurd! Jesus comes up to him and you know a lot of us would come and say to Thomas, "Let us help you get this straight." But that is not how Jesus approached him. He approached him and said, "Come here Thomas." I can't image what was going on in Thomas' mind at that point; was he embarrassed; was he upset; was he wondering what Jesus was going to say. Was he out because he doubted. He probably wasn't the only one that didn't have it all together because they were still in that locked room. Jesus said, "Go ahead touch the scars. See that is where the nail went in, touch me I am real. We don't know if Thomas actually touched Jesus or not I always envisioned that he did. I read a commentary that said that he probably didn't. We will never know will we. But what he did do—all of sudden his universe turned upside down and he said, "My Lord and my God." He put it together Jesus had said, of going to my God and your God, my Father and your Father." what the father tells me, I tell you. Thomas got that and Jesus said to him with no threat and no harshness, stop unbelieving and believes. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas confession was overcome with the realization and Jesus said something really hopeful to him and to me, "Blessed are you believe because you have seen." You have been witnesses I expect he was speaking to the whole room but blessed also are those who have believed but not seen, That story is for you and me and it is for everyone who was in that locked room and who are in the presence. Every generation the church has to meet the question whether the resurrection is true and what it means to an individual's life. Thomas' doubt was no greater than the others doubts. They didn't believe the women; they didn't believe the empty tomb. They were not any super spiritual stars themselves. Thomas had the integrity to speak out and said, "I need my own proof, I need to know for sure." That proof would carry Thomas all the way to India as a missionary. The proof would carry all of them around the world. Why did he voice the question, we will never know. Why did Jesus bother with the doubter for when 10 out of 11 is pretty good for a pass/fail test? His answer was a profound declaration, and it was beyond the sense that the resurrection worked. In

a sense he saw beyond the words; he saw beyond the wounds and he saw with his heart. Thomas has a lot in common with a lot of people today. Sure he had hung out with Jesus for three years and this embracing of Jesus in front of all the disciples but he had doubts.

There are a lot of people around us who doubt. There are a lot of none. These are not nuns, the catholic nuns; these are spelled n o n e s. You have probably heard about them from other pastor's preaching. They are the group of people when they sign up on the census and you can pick a denomination or a family or belief as to who you are. You could say spiritual but not religious, or you could say none, no belief, nothing. That none group has always been featured high the Pacific Northwest and it is now nationwide. A United Christ of Christ pastor wrote an interesting little devotional leaflet focusing on the none groups. And how do we approach those people when we come in our church? One of the things that I really appreciate about the United Church of Christ focuses on "God is still Speaking." This denomination is a living religion and there is still room for Thomas in this denomination and all the other disciples and there is room for me and people with other experiences. She picks out four kinds of none.

One group is the No Longer: They are no longer in a church. They may have been in church almost everyone in the world has been Presbyterian. Their parents got married in a Presbyterian church or the United Church of Christ or the Presbyterian Church Bible School. Lot of people identify with Presbyterian in the past but no longer go to a church maybe they were burned out or got used to not going to church or maybe they married someone liked to go camping on Sunday and not go to church. Sometimes when there is a wedding or funeral or other event; and they start thinking about something in that church relationships that was important to them but they no longer think how welcome I am I am today.

Second group of No Ways. They make a conscious choose to never go to church. They may have been in a church that was condemning. I know people who have been church where there was a huge rift in the church where people walked away and never went to church again. I have met people who because of personal circumstances were shunned in a church. Maybe they were told to behave in a certain way morally or were not grounded biblically. I know a woman who went to a church right across the street from her house. The First Baptist church welcomed her. They said, we are glad see you but next Sunday you need to wear appropriate clothing. She tended to wear jeans or pants and top and that was not good enough. Fortunately she did not become a No Way but she became, "I am I going to another church person." The No Longer and the No ways have never experienced religious community, they don't know the Bible, and they don't know from Jonah to Jeremiah and may not know much about Jesus. They come and they don't know what the Gloria Patri is but they can stand and feel like the fit in. I went once to the

Orthodox Church the lady so sweet, she opened the prayer book and showed me where we were and the prayer in Greek. That was really, really helpful. But at least it made me feel welcome. And that is the sort of thing we have to watch at the church. We are not all insiders and we don't make people feel like they are outsiders. And then there is the Not Yet we kind of describe ourselves by who we are not yet. We try to describe ourselves by what we are not. We are not like a church that makes rules. We are not like a church that makes you wear certain clothes. We need to know who we are because that is a welcoming church. So when you look around and see someone new come in and I know that people feel welcome and that is wonderful but how do we get to know them. We ask them a few questions. You don't ask them where they work or who their spouse is or how many kids they have. We don't ask them why in the world you came this Sunday. We have a guest preacher and he is really good but come next week. Too. We are glad you are here and who brought you to church. Help them to see the work of the whole church community; not just but how we share the good news and the witness of our lives. And the Holy Spirit allows us to be patient and gently like Jesus. Like the beginning church's mission, we are to be witnesses. It is up to us but how people responded it is up to them. We don't have responsibilities to save them or make them believe only to be welcoming and faithful to what we believe. Jesus offered himself faithfully and kindly to Thomas and to others. Whatever it takes I have found Jesus will do for us; whatever we see Jesus will meet us in more than half way and others too if we don't get in the way. So what do we have to offer? In my long six weeks of being here and not knowing all the secrets in and out of you, I would say we are a lively church, we are listening for God's call today, in missions in faith, and you are a welcoming church to others. Can we grow in how we find out where they are in their journey, I think so. Can we welcome them on our journey and be vulnerable to them. Can we learn and worship and service as we fellowship together. Can we experience and then share our experience of Jesus 'grace in action. Jesus said to Thomas have you believed because you have seen me, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

Let us pray

Gracious God we, thank you that Jesus is not judgmental and that he are welcoming the person that he is is the person that we want to be. Help us to know him more deeply that we might free to reach out more we pray this in your name, Jesus.