

EASTER TWO, YEAR B, APRIL 11, 2021

We've all heard the expression "leap of faith". It's commonly meant to believe or accept something intangible or unprovable and is usually associated with religious beliefs. If you've ever seen the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade", you'll recall there is a moment when Harrison Ford, playing Indiana Jones, is following clues to the Holy Grail. He is standing at the end of a tunnel staring at the entrance of another tunnel hundreds of yards away with nothing connecting them and nothing but sheer cliffs below. He is reading the clues and the final clue, as he stands at this precipice, is to take a leap of faith. With time running out to save his father, he takes a leap of faith and literally steps off the cliff into nothingness only to find himself standing on an unseen walkway. In many respects a leap of faith is just that - stepping out into the unknown.

Last Sunday when we heard John's Easter story we heard about Mary and Peter and John feeling bewildered about the empty tomb. Peter is so disbelieving that he goes back home. Only Mary goes back, encounters Jesus and then runs to tell the disciples that she has seen the Lord. But they still didn't believe her! "

It wasn't until Jesus appeared to them in the upper room that they believed. Now when we read in today's gospel about Thomas needing to see Jesus in order to believe, it actually makes me laugh to know he's the one known as doubting Thomas. Hello – everybody doubted. The disciples not only doubted but they were strangled with fear about what it all meant. They were so fearful they locked themselves in a room afraid to venture out which then leads me to the next thought.

There was only one person who wasn't in the room when Jesus first appeared, right? And that was Thomas! So, was Thomas the only one brave enough to venture out? Was Thomas the only one who had the guts to find out what was going on outside those four walls? It seems like it. What is also interesting to note is that after Jesus first appeared to the disciples in that upper room his appearance didn't seem to have any impact on them. There is no evidence that these disciples did anything or said anything to anyone about the resurrection, except to Thomas when he came back. And a week later when Jesus appeared to them again, they were still in that same room. Why were they still huddled together in that upper room?" Obviously, they were still afraid as they were behind locked doors and certainly not living as Easter people.

So, who could blame Thomas for wanting to have the same experience as the rest of the disciples? You see Thomas' faith was no less, and no weaker than the other disciple's faith. The story of Thomas is a message for the people in John's community a generation or two later when the Gospel was being written down. Their faith was based not on what they had seen with their own eyes but on what they heard. Jesus is really talking to them (and to us) when he says to Thomas, "Blessed are those who haven't seen me but believe."

What is it about proof? Why do these disciples – the ones who were closest to Jesus, who walked with him, ate at table with him, listened to the wisdom of his preaching – require something more in order to believe? And how much proof is enough to take that leap of faith?

C.S. Lewis wrote: "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to wrap a box. But

suppose that you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?"

Such is faith. What is necessary for us to believe? Think back on the stories of Jesus, his ministry, his interactions with people. Remember the stories of the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for eating food that was unwashed, for healing on the Sabbath, for sharing a meal and associating with those who were considered the less desirable people of society. And what was his response in every single case? Those are trappings, those are not the things that are important. Those are not the things of the Kingdom of God.

For me, what Thomas makes the case for, is God's invitation to trust our own experience of life and to ground our faith in it. The other apostles are asking him to believe what they do simply because they say so. In refusing to believe until he has a ground for his own faith, Thomas is telling us something radically new: he's telling us that we people have, within ourselves, the grace, the discernment, to reflect theologically on life and to tell our own truth about what God is doing in us. When Thomas announces that he will build his faith on what he himself knows, he is refusing to be a mere consumer of religion. Thomas insists on being an agent, a partner, a voice in his own spiritual life.

For Thomas and us Jesus' resurrection is not a litmus test of faith. It is an invitation into mystery. In today's Gospel, Jesus' words to his companions are simple words: "Peace be with you." "Receive the Holy Spirit." "As God has sent me, so I send you." He offers them not only a fact but an adventure, the opportunity to go more deeply into mystery, openness, generosity, possibility, new life and hope.

God did not raise Jesus so that some people who think one way about it could use their certainty to browbeat others who think about it differently. God raised Jesus so that you and I and God's world could give ourselves over to a new way of being with each other in the world. The way to a fulfilled and creative spiritual life is not to memorize or believe certain facts about Jesus. The way to a fulfilled and creative spiritual life is to claim your true identity, as Thomas did, as someone to whom Jesus offers a relationship and a journey.

So on this Second Sunday of Easter, Peace be with you. Take that leap of faith. Receive the Holy Spirit. As God sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you. Whatever overwhelms us, God comes to us in the midst of our fear and says, "Peace be with you." Whatever doubts churn in our minds, whatever sins trouble our consciences, whatever pain and worry bind us up, whatever walls we have put up or doors we have locked securely, God comes to us and says, "Peace be with you." Whatever hunger and need we feel deep in our souls, God calls us to the table, feeds us well, and sends us out into the world to do justice and be peace, salt and light, and hope for the world. We can do it, if we keep our eyes open, our minds "limber," and our hearts willing to love. As God sent Jesus, God sends us, too, into the world that God loves. Take that leap of faith and find an incredible adventure waiting for you. Amen.