

April 23, 2017
Second Sunday of Easter

“Belief is in The Resurrected”

John 20:19-31

Belief is quite important.

There was this Christian lady who had to do a lot of traveling for her business so she did a lot of flying. But flying made her nervous so she always took her Bible along with her to read and it helped relax her. One time she was sitting next to a man. When he saw her pull out her Bible he gave a little chuckle and went back to what he was doing.

After a while he turned to her and asked, "You don't really believe all that stuff in there, do you?"

The lady replied, "Of course I do. It is the Bible."

He said, "Well, what about that guy that was swallowed by that whale?"

She replied, "Oh, Jonah. Yes, I believe that, it is in the Bible."

He asked, "Well, how do you suppose he survived all that time inside the whale?"

The lady said, "Well, I don't really know. I guess when I get to heaven I will ask him."

"What if he isn't in heaven?" the man asked sarcastically.

"Then you can ask him," replied the lady.

Yes, belief is quite important. That's a point that doesn't explode off the page in our Gospel lesson this morning and we really tend to miss it because we call this the story of "Doubting Thomas." Thomas isn't doubting; he's unbelieving. Thomas is standing in an unsaved condition, outside of God's grace and under condemnation because he does...not...believe.

The risen Christ, in grace and mercy, appears again and very pointedly calls Thomas to faith and belief. Thomas knows that it is all true. Everything Christ taught and said, everything of the Holy Scriptures which Christ often quoted is true. This man who promised that He would die and three days later be raised from the dead is exactly what He claimed to be—the way and the truth and the life; salvation itself is Jesus.

Thomas's reaction is one of the great statements of faith in the Bible; simply, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas believes. Thomas is saved.

However, when we bring this episode forward 2000 years and into our own lives, it can be kind of daunting, can't it? If you break this down to basics, our reaction to Christ in faith is to be the same as that of Thomas. "My Lord and my God!"

What does this mean? It is a statement that reduces us to beings that are completely subject to the one we call Lord and God. A Lord is a master, the one who owns everything and gives the orders to those under him. God is the Creator, the one who has made us for His purposes. To faithfully look to Christ and say, "My Lord and my God!" is to surrender all authority to Christ—authority over every area of our life and being without exception!

We don't do this well; not at all. Our problem with God's lordship over us can be traced all the way back to the first sin in the garden. Adam and Eve know perfectly well, and I do mean perfectly, that God was their Lord. God had created them for His purposes and they were in His image and will doing humanity right—righteously—according to His design as His creatures...and it was good.

But then temptation came along: "Eat...and you will be like God." In other words, "Eat...and you can be the authority over you, not God." Well, they jumped at that and brought creation crashing down under sin's curse.

As promised, the Messiah has come, the very Son of God crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins, for you! You know this! You rejoice in this! You receive this by grace through faith in Word and Sacrament. You believe! You are saved!

But, you and I still struggle with the authority thing—with the being a God unto ourselves thing. We say “My Lord and my God” ...except when it comes to my money. We say “My Lord and my God” ...except when it comes to sex. We say “My Lord and my God” ...except when it comes to humbling myself when it comes to “those people”. We say “My Lord and my God” ...except when it comes to forgiving that certain person who offended me so badly.

Or it may not even be overtly grabbing authority to sin, but simply tuning God out where you deem it convenient. At school hanging with more popular kids, but ignoring and looking down on others. At work, assuming the authority to put the desire for profit above the Christian imperative to love and serve your neighbor...because it's work! In many arenas of life we just kind of default to it being “my time” and “I'm in charge” to the exclusion of God's authority. It's a sin problem.

We know this. We realize this. We repent of this, and by Word and Sacrament we are forgiven this. In response to God's goodness to us we resolve ourselves to go out and do better at turning our lives over to God. We look around our lives, the places where we outright sin and those places where we just routinely kind of exclude God, and we resolve that we're going to do better.

I'm certainly not going to talk against that—more power to ya!

But in light of this great story of Christ gifting faith to Thomas I want to stress one very important point: Thomas's faith comes from realizing that the one who was crucified is risen from the dead! Nothing changed with Thomas from the week before when he stood under condemnation in unbelief to the next Sunday when he stood in the same place saved in faith, other than the faith. Thomas hadn't gotten better, performed better, obeyed God's rules better. He simply, at the behest of Christ, stopped unbelieving and believed.

I say this because part of our mistake of usurping authority is that we like to grab the authority to make our way to God's grace. We almost unknowingly can slip into the trap of saying, *I* need to be a better Christian for God so God will save me. And you might think you never do that, but have you ever slipped into sin...again...and doubted if God could love and forgive you because you just can't get it right? In that kind of thinking, you're acting like it's up to you to save you.

No. The belief that saves never blooms from you, and growing and strengthening your belief is never going to happen by looking at you. When you look at you and your performance as a Christian, the only measure you have is God's Law, and that will always trip you up. It will always condemn you. If that's where you're focused, “My Lord and my God” can only be a cry of lament and fear because the only belief you can find there is the belief that you are damned.

No, look to the risen Christ as Thomas did. Focus on what it means that the one who was crucified to death with your sins—that He now lives. Know what Thomas realized, that this Christ is true, that He exercised the authority to lay down His life and pick it back up again. That He has the authority to forgive sins and not only that, the authority to work through His church to do the same, *“If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven.”* Know that He is love made manifest for the forgiveness of your sins.

With this truth driving your faith, like Thomas, declaring Jesus “My Lord and my God” is pleasure and rejoicing because your Lord and God is blessing upon blessing forever. He is Lord and God salvation, your salvation, and you want no other.

Belief is quite important, all important. Place your faith in the risen Jesus, your Lord and God, and let His blessed, loving authority reign everywhere in your life today in time, and tomorrow in eternity.

Amen.