

No Doubt!

John 20: 24–31

by Rev. Dr. Lynda Reid

This meditation is based on John 20:24–31. It could be presented by two or three people. There will be an opportunity for the reader to share her own experience of doubting and the consequences. Three stories of new mission work within The Presbyterian Church in Canada are included, but may be substituted with your own local stories or others available on the Presbyterian web pages.

All scripture quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

SERMON

PART 1: *This section should be delivered in a narrative style or as a story.*

He wasn't trying to be awkward. He certainly wasn't trying to be funny. He didn't want to doubt their words—he wanted to believe. He really did! After all, Jesus was his friend and if he had the chance to see him only once more, he would take it. He would cherish such a moment!

Thomas had always been that way. He had to see things for himself. Touch things, examine them, find out how something worked before he really believed it could work. He questioned things, too. Probed and prodded until he understood.

Only a short time before his trial and death, Jesus had told the disciples that he was going away—and they knew the way. They were all confused by this strange statement, so Thomas asked, “Lord, we do not know where you are going? How can we know the way?” (John 14:5–6)

Jesus reply was even stranger—I am the way.

Now, Jesus was dead, how could he be the “way” when he was dead? But, was he dead? All of them

had heard the reports from the women who had gone to the burial place and found the stone which concealed the opening of the tomb. It had been rolled away and the body of Jesus was gone. And some claimed that they had seen him! They all wanted to believe Jesus was alive. And now, the other disciples told Thomas they had seen Jesus. They had been gathered together in a locked room and suddenly Jesus stood among them, talked with them and blessed them.

When Thomas heard this he replied, “I don’t believe it! I can’t believe it until I see him for myself. Let me touch his wounds and hear his voice.”

Jesus knew that Thomas needed to see him, needed to have that personal contact. He wanted Thomas to believe his resurrection. Once more the disciples were in a locked room. They had to be careful as they were known as Jesus’ friends and were in danger as the authorities could also condemn them to death for their secret meetings.

Once more Jesus stood among them. This time he addressed Thomas, “See the wounds of the nails in my hands, my feet. Put your hand here in my side where the spear made its mark. Listen to my words of peace to you. Believe in my resurrection, Thomas. Do not doubt!”

Thomas saw Jesus with his own eyes, he heard Jesus’ voice with his own ears, and he felt Jesus’ body with his own hands. There was no more doubt. Thomas’ response was a profound statement of belief: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Jesus ends this visit with the disciples with these words, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29)

PART 2: Doubt can hold us back

We can all relate to Thomas. Doubting is just a part of our make-up.

Some doubt plans can be finished because they need to know all the details. Everything has to be in place before the doubting stops and they move forward. The result can be a vision lost, a dream dashed.

Often, we doubt our capacity to reach a decision if there are too many options. Confusion arises and we become frozen in the present even if it is not helpful.

Maybe we doubt our own abilities and talents to try something different. We think it's better to trust the things I do well rather than spread my wings and fail.

Then, of course, there is that old familiar enemy—fear of the unknown. We doubt anything new will be as good as what is comfortable, cozy, and correct.

(NOTE: A personal story may be inserted here. It could be about a time when doubting either stopped or delayed a decision and the consequences. It could also centre on the doubting being overcome by victory.)

There are situations when doubting is a good thing. It is a sign that we are truly evaluating the way to proceed. However, letting the doubt cripple us, is not a good thing. Thomas' doubting was preventing him from have a full relationship with Jesus. If he had never resolved his doubt, Jesus would always be dead to him. Jesus would only have been a great teacher and true friend. By fully embracing Jesus resurrection, Thomas entered into a full covenant relationship with Jesus. He became a true disciple and servant of God.

PART 3: New missions in The Presbyterian Church in Canada

We are aware of the state of the church in today's society. More and more congregations are closing. Some are joining with other congregations. A few are co-operating with developers to create new kinds of housing with the church located in one room or a shared community space. We also wonder if we as a church are still fulfilling Christ's mission mandate.

Like the little critters who lost their tunnels in my friend's garden, change happens in our lives. One response to the change, whether drastic or simple, is often to doubt that things can be the same again! And they can't. As believers in the gospel though, we are assured that God has something better in store. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we have the stories of God promising better days or assuring his people that he is about to do new things.

The mission mandate of The Presbyterian Church in Canada has changed dramatically over the decades. Now our church works in partnership with other denominations and churches which are well established in the local area.

I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in our midst. Listen to three examples of new ministries in the Presbyterian Church.

From International Ministries:

“LET US SPREAD THE TENT OF INCLUSION” is a motto for the new ministry of the Centre for Minority Issues and Mission in Tokyo Japan. This is a cooperative initiative of the PCC, KCCJ (Korean Christian Church in Japan) and UCC (The United Church of Canada), and other Christian organizations. This ministry began April 2017 under the leadership of David McIntosh (yes, he is the son of the late Rev. Jack McIntosh and Clara Beth McIntosh). In Japan in 2012 there was a surge in racist activity, especially with hate speech and abusive language targeting primarily people of Korean and Chinese heritage. The Centre works with ecumenical and civil society partners to combat racism. They also encourage the government to improve legal support for vulnerable minorities.

An important aspect for combating racism is to begin with the youth. The Centre brings youth together to think about the world through the eyes and stories of the vulnerable. All of this is done through the lens of reading scripture. The youth are asked to listen to God’s call for justice to combat the racist encounters.

Racism and hate speech are prevalent not only in Japan but are world-wide issues. God’s spirit has helped bring this to light and the work being done with the Centre in Japan could be a model. It can help us learn how to be advocates for those who are targets of hate speech and racism and find a solution to this situation.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is guiding the church into new partnerships to tackle today’s overwhelming issues.

From the Women's Missionary Society:

For the past several years the WMS has chosen special projects that need funding. They usually work in co-operation with Presbyterians Sharing or Presbyterian World Service and Development. One of these projects is in Haiti. You may think it is assistance in earthquake recovery, but no. A health-based organization is working with healthcare workers, school directors, police officers, and community members to address the issue of gender-based violence.

A quote from WMSMatters, Summer 2018: "Women are central pillars of the family and community in Haiti but are frequently vulnerable to sexual violence." A sexual assault victim is further victimized on a multitude of levels; by a justice system that is indifferent, unaware or ill equipped to address GBV crimes; by community members who may mock or shun GBV victims; by a health system often unable to prevent post-assault pregnancy or sickness due to poor training or weak coordination.

The project is seeing results. A caring group of people are tackling the issues of gender inequality, poverty, and education to bring an end to gender-based violence.

Our God is a God of justice. There is no doubt that God is standing beside the women of Haiti. In the midst suffering, there is hope because the work being done is guided by God's love and peace.

Through the *Glad Tidings* and Together We Can! Projects the WMS is giving us glimpses of new missions which need our concern, prayer, and action.

From Canadian Ministries:

Cornerstone is a new ministry in Dunnville, Ontario. Nicole Reid, from the Knox Presbyterian Church saw a way that the church and the community's pregnancy centre could co-operate and bring the Christian gospel to families. Canadian Ministries has assisted with a start-up grant for this ministry. Here is Nicole's story about Cornerstone.

"The beginning of Cornerstone was a God thing. I graduated from Knox College and was seeking a call. During that time, I worked part-time at the Haldimand Pregnancy Care and Family Centre. The staff discerned that several clients were interested in the faith because they

saw that the Christian staff were “different”. So we ran the Alpha program for about 10 clients. After that, they asked “what’s next” and that is basically the reason Cornerstone began— to address their hunger for spiritual things.

At the same time, Knox was in the midst of a 5-year discernment process to determine how we could be more missional and support our community in practical ways. The congregation chose to support the Centre.

The main purpose of Cornerstone is to “birth lambs” into the family of God. Many clients of the Center have little or no faith background and because of many challenges in their lives would never enter a church building. Cornerstone is a missional ministry, providing bi-weekly non-traditional worship, individual counseling, and social events. The hope is that once the clients are ready to leave the Centre, they will have some knowledge and experience of Christianity and will be able to take that next step and go to a traditional church on Sunday mornings. A couple of families have already taken that step.

What a wonderful way to bring Jesus’s resurrection story to the people who need it.”

The people at Knox are recognizing God’s hand at Cornerstone. There is no doubt that it is becoming a community of Christ’s disciples.

(Here is an opportunity to share. Share a story about a new project or ministry supported by your church or WMS/AMS group; a ministry that illustrates God’s promise of better days or God’s assurance to his people that he is about to do new things.)

CONCLUSION:

We today, 2000 years after the incredible event of Christ’s resurrection, are among those who did not see the risen Christ, and yet are asked to believe and not doubt. We like to have evidence of Jesus continuing ministry in the world.

Maybe we see Jesus’ wounds when we see people in countries like Myanmar suffering from hunger and want and the world community trying over and over to bring food and shelter.

Maybe we feel the scar on Jesus' side when we encounter the scarred people of Syria who have left home and country and we embrace them into our community.

Maybe the nail prints on Jesus' hands and feet are more real when blood runs from a young person's gunshot wound and yet we know many churches are offering the sanctuary of their building as a safe place for children and youth to gather.

We do not have all the answers to our doubts. We may not have an answer at all to some of the atrocities prevalent in our communities, but we still see God's hand at work in our world. Let us say with confidence "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" and serve the risen Christ in our church, community, and the world.

The worship resources for Mission Awareness Sunday have been written by The Rev. Dr. Lynda Reid. Lynda is a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church. For many years she was the education consultant for the Synod of Central, Northeastern Ontario & Bermuda. Lynda enjoys volunteering in her home congregation Knox, Oshawa. She has an enthusiasm for music and her cat soothes her soul.