

## **“We Too Have Come To Believe”**

**A Sermon for Saint John the Baptist’s Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, MN**

**Second Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2017**

**by The Rev. Craig Lemming, *Transitional Deacon***

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**In the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.**

I have a rather complicated idea to share with you this morning. Fear not! This idea is very good for our brains. It will wake us up! Listen to these words:

**Everyone who doubts knows that he is doubting, so that he is certain of this truth at least, namely the fact that he doubts. Thus every one who doubts whether there is such a thing as truth, knows at least one truth, so that his very capacity to doubt should convince him that there is such a thing as truth.<sup>1</sup>**

These are the words of Fr. Frederick Copleston: a Jesuit priest, philosopher, and historian of philosophy. Some of you may know about my fondness for Jesuits. They were my teachers in my childhood and adolescence in Zimbabwe,<sup>2</sup> and what I loved most about the Jesuit approach to faith was their encouragement of our questions. They wanted us schoolboys to know why we believed what we believe for ourselves; instead of mindlessly subscribing to dogma. Copleston invites us into a new relationship with doubt. He teaches us that our doubts can present us with the gift of truth. Thomas’s doubts in today’s Gospel present us with the gift of the ultimate truth: Christ is Risen!

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1999), 53.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stgeorges.co.zw/> (Accessed April 22, 2017).

On that first day of the week Thomas was not with his fellow disciples. When Jesus stood among them; showed them his hands and his side; breathed on them; and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” Thomas was not there for that experience. Thomas did not have this intimately sensuous encounter with the Risen Christ that the other disciples enjoyed. The sight, the sound, the aroma, the touch of the Risen Christ was a palpable reality for them. Thomas, grieving the brutal death of his friend and teacher, had no such access – through his own senses – to the Risen Christ, as an experiential reality. When the disciples tell Thomas, “We have seen the Lord,” **Thomas says, “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.”**<sup>3</sup>

Relating this passage of scripture to the global observance of Earth Day, we recognize a parallel between Thomas’s stubborn refusal to accept the truths reported to him, with the stubborn refusal by leaders in seats of power to accept the facts of climate change.<sup>4</sup> No matter what your stance may be regarding climate change, I think we can all empathize with what it means to have doubts. How do we engage with someone who adamantly proclaims: “I will not believe”?

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<sup>3</sup> John 20:24-25.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/climatechange/climate-change-basic-information> (Accessed April 21, 2017).

This weekend's Google Doodle for Earth Day<sup>5</sup> offers us one approach to a possible solution. To quote the Google Doodle:

**Today's Doodle follows the story of a fox who dreams about an Earth that's been polluted and adversely affected by climate change. The fox wakes with a startle, and urgently starts making small lifestyle changes to care for the Earth. Along the way, the fox enlists friends – including Momo the cat, and Google Weather's favorite frog – to join its quest to protect and nurture the environment.**

**To combat things like coral bleaching and pollution, the three eco-rangers are inspired to take action such as eating less meat, carpooling, and unplugging unused electronic devices. That's some heroic work for tiny animals!**

As Episcopalians, this approach coincides with our Church's Fifth Mark of Mission:

**"To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life**

**of the earth."**<sup>6</sup> As Google's fox, cat, and frog teach us, by turning off the lights

when we leave a room; by planting trees in our communities; by carpooling,

walking, biking, or taking public transit; and by eating fruits, vegetables, or locally

sourced foods – regardless of our doubts about climate change – with these small

lifestyle changes we can all strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and

sustain and renew the life of the earth.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.google.com/doodles/earth-day-2017> (Accessed April 21, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/five-marks-mission> (accessed April 21, 2017).

Some of you may be wondering, what on earth – pun intended – does the Google Doodle, fox, frog, and Momo the cat have to do with Doubting Thomas? Stay with me! I’m going to get there! Today’s Gospel tells us that:

**Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’<sup>7</sup>**

The Peace of Christ opens doors of doubt that are shut. His intimately sensual encounter with Christ convinces Thomas of the Truth. The only adequate response to the sight, sound, aroma, and touch of the Risen Christ is Worship. “My Lord and my God!” are the only adequate words Thomas can utter. When we engage our senses with the marvels of “this fragile earth, our island home”<sup>8</sup> the only adequate response to the sights, sounds, aromas, flavors, and touch of Mother Earth is reverence. “My Lord and my God!” are the only adequate words we, particularly in Minnesota, can utter when Spring bursts forth unstoppably into new life!

Jesus does not leave Thomas alone in his doubts. Jesus returns within a week to invite him into a visceral experience and encounter with the Risen Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> John 20:26-28.

<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, 370.

Likewise, Jesus does not leave us alone in our doubts. Every week we are invited into a visceral experience and encounter with the Risen Christ who is present in God's Word and Sacraments. In this sacred place, the Risen Christ is seen in one another. The Risen Christ is heard in Holy Scripture and in Music. The Risen Christ is in the aroma of flowers and incense; the Risen Christ is in St. John's signature robust hugs and warm handshakes; and most intimately in the sacred taste of Bread and Wine at Holy Communion.

**“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”<sup>9</sup>**

Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> John 20:29.