

In Whom Do We Trust?

Today is the only non-festival Sunday in the church year that has the same readings for all three years of the Revised Common Lectionary. This presents a bit of a quandary for preachers in that it makes it difficult to decide on what to preach. The easy way out is just to reuse the previous sermon, hoping that people would not remember that it is the same sermon from a year ago. However, with this new time of many recorded services out on the internet, it would be rather easy to check if the pastor is preaching the same sermon or not. So, the question of what to preach on to make it sound new is highlighted on a day like today. Selecting one of the other texts is not a real good option, either. Preaching on the Book of Revelation cannot be adequately done in a single, short sermon. This book requires an in-depth look that is best done in a Bible study. The reading from the Book of Acts would require a lot of context in which the reading is found and also a hint at the verses that follow this text. So, that would not necessarily be an adequate option to avoid the Gospel reading.

The danger in preaching on the Gospel story of 'Doubting Thomas' is that we focus on Thomas and by extension, on us and in the process forget that the Bible is God's story. So, instead of trying to find a new angle to talk about Thomas, I would like to focus on the last verses where John tells us why he has included the signs that he has and why he has written his Gospel account. The reason John is writing is so that we may come to "believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NRSV). One could focus then on the verb tense of 'believe' in the Greek and explore exactly what John means and to whom he is writing. However, I would like to take a different approach to this verse.

The words we choose to use matter and what word a translator chooses to use when translating from language to another can sometimes alter the understanding of the text. For example in the verse I just quoted, the translators of the NRSV used the word 'believe.' The Complete Jewish Bible which was translated by a Messianic Jewish Rabbi from the Greek and Hebrew translates the Greek word that is typically translated as "believe" or "faith," translates it as **trust**. The more I thought about it, the more there seems to be a difference between these synonyms. To illustrate: There is a story of a high-wire walker who was going to walk a wire over Niagara Falls. A slip and fall off the wire would mean a certain plunge to one's death on the rocks at the bottom of the Falls. As he was preparing to begin his walk, a young boy shouted out to him, "I believe that you can do it!" He then asked the boy if he trusted him. The boy replied that he believed the man could do it. After a couple of more exchanges of believing and trusting between the boy and the high-wire walker, the man said that if the boy trusted him that he could cross the falls, then the boy should climb on his back and he would carry him across on the wire. When we trust in someone or something, then we will be willing to back it up with action. Simply by believing, does not necessarily spur us to action. Trust could be said to be an emotional response while belief or faith could be said to be an intellectual response. Trust implicitly has a relationship aspect to it; there is more of a two-way street aspect where both parties will be doing something. By just saying, "I believe" or "I have faith in whatever" implies that we benefit from the actions of to object of faith with little or no involvement on our part.

So, if we use this concept of trust in the last verses of this Gospel reading, there is a change in perspective of the purpose of John's writing his account. Instead of just believing in Jesus, John wants us to be able to trust in Jesus, to go

with Jesus where He goes. To trust that Jesus is who He claims to be and who others claim Him to be, namely the Son of God, the Messiah. But what does it mean to trust in someone who has not been seen? It doesn't seem that far-fetched, since people are asking us to trust them all the time in many different ways. From our leaders to advertisers, others are continually asking us to 'trust them' in what they are telling us, sometimes contrary to what we have observed.

But that still leaves us with how do we know whom to trust? We can either be really gullible and trust whatever anyone tells us, because 'nobody would lie to us on purpose' or be so skeptical as to not believe anything except that which we can see for ourselves. One thing to help us is to know who is telling us to trust them. Do they have a penchant for stretching the truth, turning facts around so as to make themselves look better or to gain an advantage over others? Is what they are wanting you to trust them about for their benefit or for yours? Applying this criterion to Jesus, we see that He never told anything or did anything for His own advantage, it was always to help others and to point to God's glory.

John has carefully crafted his Gospel account to take us from being skeptical about Jesus, from concluding too soon who Jesus cannot be, to this point where we can trust who Jesus is. By showing us people such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man who was born blind and even Peter and the disciples and now Thomas, John reassures us that faith in Jesus is a process, a journey where there are forces that try to disrupt our journey with Jesus to God, forces that try to tell us that Jesus is not the one to be trusted. John also shows us that Jesus's response is a response borne out of love and compassion to each of these different expressions of doubt about Jesus. This response by Jesus meets us where we are, in the midst of our questions, in the midst of trying to reconcile

the world as we see it with the world as *God sees* it and walks along with us, taking us to where we need to go.

Trust is a very fragile thing. It takes work to establish and can take a long time, yet it can be broken in an instant and may never be fully restored. When we trust in created things such as other people or concepts or anything else created, that trust is even more fragile. However, when we trust in the Creator, the Biblical record shows that we can trust in *God* and that *God* is true to *God's* word. John uses in his *Gospel* account all those signs of what Jesus did and tells us that we can get on Jesus's back and cross that high wire over to the other side of eternal life. Our calling, so to speak, is then how to use that trust, not for what we want, but to show others that they can trust in the same promises we do and that it does make a difference on this side.

As we continue to live in Biblical times, until that time when Jesus comes again and fulfills all of *God's* promises to us, may we find those opportunities to show *God's* love for others, to others.

YouTube links:

Gospel and sermon: <https://youtu.be/pRdFFU9OIIU>

Service: <https://youtu.be/FWtsKz-bVC8>