

2 Easter B 2018

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Is it bad to doubt?

I doubt it.

I am in two minds about it,

Which is, quite literally, what it means to doubt.

Of course I might want to be free of doubt,

Because doubt is uncomfortable.

But on the other hand, I know

Doubt is a very natural function of the inquiring mind.

It means, at its roots,

To keep on being of two minds about something.

That's hard for us,

In a world increasingly polarized,

Increasingly insistent on instant answers,

Anxious about being right.

And what is true of the world,

Might be true of our community right now as well.

If you are a visitor this morning –

Or here to see children baptized –

Then I invite you to hear what I say

Through the lens of your own experience,

Some time when you did not know what to do,

How to weigh the cost and promise

Of potential actions.

But for those of us who worship here week by week,

Let's look at our doubts,

As we face a moment of discernment and decision

About our proposed permanent supportive housing development.

We may be taking sides,

We may want to know the answer

Before an answer exists,

We may be gripped by anxiety

About making the right choice.

We are in doubt,

And that's painful,

Because doubt is hard to embrace,
And we tend to avoid it or malign it or plow through it.

That's a loss,
Because if doubt means being of two minds,
it means weighing alternatives,
Wondering about things,
Asking how something can be so,
Puzzling it over.
It means learning through exploring.

That means
This is a time for doubt.

And so we come to this morning's gospel
And wonder,
How can this resurrection story
That seems to be about doubt and belief
Inspire or guide us in our work together?

Yes, it can.

Even though this is not a story about doubt.

When Thomas insists
That he needs to see and touch the wounds of Jesus,
Is he doubting?

Actually, no.
That's not what the story says.

This is not a story about doubt,
About holding alternatives in tension,
It's a story about faith,
And no faith,
And the journey from no faith
To faith.

The disciples are hiding and fearful
And mourning the death of Jesus.
And then,
mysteriously, Jesus
Is among them,
Absolutely real and true.
He inspires them,
Gives them the peace

that only the presence of God can bring.
And they are filled with joy,
Joy that is our response
to knowing the presence of God.

Thomas is not present.
He misses the moment;
He's left out of the experience.
But I don't think his problem is doubt.
He doesn't say, I'm of two minds about this:
On the one hand,
I think it's true,
On the other hand,
I think it's impossible.
Asking questions,
Wondering,
That's not what he's doing.

He's been a questioner all along the way,
But now, instead of questioning, he demands.
I need to see him and touch him
In order to know it's really Jesus, alive and here with us.
He's asking for something that Jesus is not offering.
Jesus comes breathing peace
And bringing joy,
And Thomas asks for evidence instead.
He's not doubting, he's demanding.

The story doesn't talk about doubt.
Jesus said something different to Thomas.
Don't be faithless, Jesus says.
Be faithful.

Faithless is different from doubting.
Doubt is a moment we encounter
On the journey in faith,
A moment we come to over and over.
Who wouldn't doubt,
Looking at the world?
Who wouldn't doubt,
Knowing what we, each of us,
Have done
And what has happened to us?
Who wouldn't doubt when faced,
As we are,
With a choice between one potential good

and another potential good,
Where only one good can come into being?
Doubt and faith can live together,
And they do,
At least in me,
And in many of you who share your stories with me.
Doubt is not the problem.

What Jesus says is, don't be faithless.

Faithless living is a dead end;
It's a life where we don't believe things can change,
Where we insist that there is nothing more than what we know,
Where we stick to old habits and patterns
Because we think what we know must be better
Than the unknown.
It's a life where we turn away from a precious surprise
Because we're sure our needs can only be met one way.
That's the life in which faithless Thomas is stuck.

Thomas is sure his need can only be met one way:
By touching the wounded flesh
Of the living Christ.
The gift, though, was not the touching,
But the restoration of relationship
With the one he thought was dead.

That's the faithlessness of Thomas
Until he came to faith.
That's the faithlessness of any of us
When we refuse to change,
To meet a challenge,
To move out into a new and unknown future.

And so the invitation is for us as well.
Don't be faithless, be faithful.
Hold the doubts in one hand,
And with the other,
Reach out and touch the promise of God.
The future is unknown,
But because God is in it,
It will be good.

I don't know what the way forward looks like yet for us.
I am filled with doubts.
But I do know this:

The doubts are not the opposite of faith.
Only no faith is the opposite of faith.

And I know we have faith.
We have the hope of unity beyond division.
We have a vision of sanctuary.
We just have to find out what it looks like on the ground,
At this moment in our life together.

Though we are filled with doubts,
Most of us,
About how we are called to live into our mission,
Though we keep on being of two minds
About where the greater promise lies,
Still in the midst of our doubts,
We have everything we need
To work as God's partners
Towards a better future.

Because we have faith.
And doubts.
Our doubts, our being of two minds,
May lead us to a new question,
A question that brings unity
Rather than division.

The question is not:
Should we build permanent supportive housing
Or keep our parking lot.

The new question,
The still unknown question,
Is this:
How do we live now into the promise of God?

How do we create a wider space in which to doubt?

Perhaps by imagining a community of love and trust.

The story we heard from Acts,
Where the early Christians shared all things in common
And none were in need,
May never have happened
In the way the story tells it.
But the story is true.
But it offers a vision of radical sharing

That promotes the unity
Of the body of Christ.

We could take it literally,
And say it shows us a way forward.
But I doubt that is true.

It's one story,
One true story that may never have happened that way,
Of a community that found a way to live in love.

I don't know yet what way we will find
To live in love.
But I know the way is there.

So let's be a community where doubt does its work,
Where we have the courage
To stay in our two minds
until we have learned enough from each other,
until we have discerned the cost and promise of our options,
And then, when doubt,
When keeping on being of two minds
Has done its work,
Let's be a community where we act in faith,
And look forward into the unknown future with courage.

I have no doubts about this.
The risen Christ is among us,
Offering us everything we need to embrace the future
In hope.