

Doubtless or Faithless!

Acts 4³²⁻³⁵; Psalm 133; 1 John 1¹⁻²²; John 20^{19-end}

Do not doubt but believe. (John 20²⁷)

Thomas puts doubt on the map - he gives permission to all those who follow him to have questions. Or does he?

My friend, Canon David Jennings, used to be very insistent that doubt isn't the opposite of faith, that certainty is. He could be very convincing - but mistaken.

Forgive just the briefest of Greek lessons. The word for faith is *pistis*. Then you need to know that an *a* at the beginning of a Greek word makes it a negative. In John 20²⁷ the Greek text says: *καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός*. This could be translated as **do not be an unbeliever, but a believer** or even, **stop becoming an unbeliever and become a believer**. Doubt negates faith!

When I began my preparation for this sermon I fully expected to deliver a gentle and positive sermon supporting those who have doubts, but doubt is a rejection of faith. I had done my homework:

- ✦ Thomas had been a faithful disciple and then Jesus offers him evidence to counter his doubts - but there is no evidence he took the opportunity of poking around Jesus wounds: it was meeting Jesus that made the difference.
- ✦ The body of research suggests that doubt is a personal matter - it is a conviction about how true or how false something is: it is not often based on facts or evidence but on how you feel about something.
- ✦ Doubts come at different levels - someone could believe in the existence of God but may have doubts beyond that, eg. On God's reliability and that skews the relationship.
- ✦ That some think that doubt is a form of denial - some continue to seek for evidence in the face of evidence and then doubt becomes irrational

as they themselves don't know what it would take for their doubts to be resolved.

Doubts keep us from commitment, not because we doubt God or even God as we know him in Christ, but we doubt our ability to live up to the commitment that this God demands from us.

- ✦ It is permissible to stand in awe of the resurrection, but only a fool at the same level of members of the Flat Earth Society would deny that it happened. Certainly, it breaks the laws of nature - that is the point of it! We cannot meet the Risen Christ in his physical body, but those who did - even Thomas - were convinced by it. Belief in the historic Jesus, living, dying and raised from the dead is part of the commitment God asks from us.
- ✦ John, in his First Epistle is at pains to point out that he knows what he is talking about: **we declare to you What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life**. Not much wiggle-room with that series of statements. He anticipates three things from this: i) **joy** ii) a realism about our own **sin** and iii) that we accept Jesus as **the atoning sacrifice for our sins**. An acceptance that forgiveness is obtained through this same historic Jesus is also part of the commitment God asks from us.
- ✦ Acts introduces a practical reality that is part of the commitment God requires of us. God's ownership of us means that we have a light grasp on the things that society think are important. The manifesto of the early Church is summed up in the words **now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no-one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common**. What a testimony to faith are the words **there was not a needy person among them**.

Doubting ourselves is no excuse for rejecting faith - faith exists to save us from ourselves!