

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**April 23, 2017 – Easter #2**  
**John 20:19-31 Doubting Thomas**

Every Sunday we express our faith by saying one of several creeds, usually the Apostles Creed. Even when we don't believe all or understand everything what we say out loud, we say the creed / what we believe, together as a community and in this way, reaffirm our belief and hold each other up in our unbelief.

Jeremie has just finished a 6 week course, taught by Harry, to prepare him for Confirmation. He was confirmed by the Bishop a week ago Saturday night at the Easter Vigil at St. Paul's. In the ceremony, he was asked if he believed certain things; statements that are taken from our creeds. He affirmed each question asked by Bishop Logan in a loud, clear, confident voice. And then the rest of us attending were asked to affirm our faith as well. And then we made a commitment to support Jeremie in his faith journey.

Today's reading from the gospel of John ties into our use of the creed. To help us reorient our lives to believe the promise of life Jesus promised us. A belief that is mystical, incredible and profound in a world that is addicted to facts and data.

In today's reading we see Thomas being met by Jesus in his disbelief. Jesus has died but has not yet ascended to heaven. Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the other disciples; when he reassured them repeatedly and gave them the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. When the others tell Thomas that Jesus has

appeared to them in the locked room where they were hiding, Thomas says, "I don't believe you. Unless I have direct experience, I cannot believe. It's too fantastic! I need to see to believe." Thomas cannot believe what he is unable to imagine; what defies his idea of how the world, and God, operate.

Yet a week later Thomas' doubt is met, head on.

Jesus allows Thomas to do what will satisfy and relieve his doubt – to touch his wounds. Then Thomas believes, but Jesus speaks the words that go beyond that specific situation to the general condition of humanity: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." And that would be..... us!

We all love to think we're above, or not like, Thomas. But the truth is that we all live in some degree of disbelief. It's part of our nature. Poor Thomas is the one who expresses that part of ourselves that we might not like to admit is there, or that we justify, or try and explain away. But we all have some aspect of Thomas within us.

Why do we act like Thomas? Why do we doubt the power we have been given to do God's work? - To release others from their sins and reduce suffering in others? Why do we pull back, hold back, push back against those things we can't see but are very much real?

Because believing is counter-cultural. Believing goes against science and reason and all seeming practicality. Yet as Christians we are called to be counter-cultural. To not be cynical, or despairing, or to pretend that we know the mind and plans of God. To believe means

to engage without knowing how life will unfold. To believe means to trust.

The only way to get at this upside-down way of looking at the world, through the eyes and heart of belief, is to tell a story.

Jim and I met Daniel about 5 years ago. Daniel lives in Nigeria. He was born a Muslim and converted to Christianity many years ago. I don't know anyone who quite walks their talk the way Daniel and his wife Esther do. When Daniel and Esther married, they lived a simple rural life – poor by our standards. They began having children. Then one day, they found a baby on their doorstep. They took it in and made it one of their own. Word got around. More babies appeared. They stretched their meagre budget to feed, clothe and take care of these children, both Christian and Muslim, who had been abandoned because their parents couldn't take care of them. Mothers die giving birth at an alarmingly high rate in the area where they live. Single fathers don't know how to care for an infant or other little children while working to eke out a living. If a child is born with a deformity, is albino or gets injured, the parents often don't know how to care for them. The Edeh household began expanding at an alarming speed. But Daniel never panicked. "The Lord will provide," was and is his mantra. And sure enough, someone from North America learned about what Daniel and Esther are doing and began to raise funds and send supplies to support what was emerging as a fledging orphanage. Soon women who were rejected by their society began to show up at the orphanage and Daniel came up with the idea of integrating them

into the community as “aunties.” These women who were widowed, “too old” to get married, or who had some kind of deformity themselves found themselves as the head of a “family unit,” taking care of several small children and enjoying being able to make a meaningful and important contribution.

Today their orphanage, the largest in Nigeria, independent of any government involvement, is home to over 300 children. Daniel, whom all the children call Daddy, educates all of them and dozens now have gone on to higher education.

We met Daniel when he came to the school where my husband Jim, whom you’ll meet next week, is chaplain. My cousin and her husband were hosting him on the Island as part of a North American tour to meet all the people in the west who support MOM – the Ministry of Mercy orphanage.

Jim invited Daniel to speak in chapel and his message moved the students and staff profoundly. His simple and deep faith was evident. The students nicknamed him, “the Nigerian Gandhi” in recognition of his gentle strength. His trust moved the headmaster to commit, spontaneously at the end of the chapel service, to raising enough funds to purchase a big truck to move supplies over very rough roads.

At lunch, sitting at a table at one of the wealthiest schools in the country, Daniel was amazed at the amount of food, and how much of it was thrown out after the meal was done. He showed no outrage or judgment. All he said was “it’s a miracle that you have all this food

here.” And commented, “It would be wonderful if one of my children could experience this.”

That comment grabbed my husband and I. We arranged for Daniel to send one of his biological children to Shawnigan Lake School. The headmaster provided full scholarship and we hosted. Enyo arrived just over 4 years ago, a very slight, wide-eyed 14-year-old, wearing open-toed shoes in the middle of winter.

The first morning I asked her how many eggs she would like. She didn’t seem to understand. We finally figured out that rations dictated that she ate one egg a week back home. No wonder our question didn’t compute. This also was the morning she discovered bacon, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone enjoy something so much!

Today Enyo is waiting to see if she will get a student visa to study at a university in the States where she is being offered a scholarship for her athletic abilities. It hasn’t been an easy road for Enyo but Enyo’s own faith, conviction and hard work has brought her to a very good place in her life.

MOM continues to grow. Daniel and Esther never planned to start or run an orphanage. But they responded to a dire need in their community trusting that God would provide. And God has. With the help of many people around the world. Today MOM has a clinic and a hospital where women receive prenatal and postnatal care and give birth in a safe environment. Dentists and doctors, nurses and midwives travel to MOM each year to help out for a week ....or 4.

People all over North America send money and supplies. Daniel has helped hundreds of children grow up healthy and secure, educated and ready to contribute.... simply because he continues to be open to God's call and trusts God's abundant nature.

The gospel reading ends today with John saying, "these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." Certainly through Daniel's faith and belief, MANY have come to have life in Jesus' name.

What a witness! We all need stories to help our belief. We need to share these stories. And we need to encourage each other to believe when challenges seem insurmountable. We have the signs and words of Jesus, thanks to the gospel writers. Now, we just have to put our belief into practice. And we have ample opportunity. The question we need to ask ourselves today is, how can we as the community of St. Mary's be open to God's call and trust in God's abundance? Where is my doubt, and your doubt, getting in the way of bring life in Jesus' name? .....

Amen.