

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH**  
**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA**  
*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5*  
*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,  
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

**April 11, 2021**

**Easter 2**

**...We Gather to Worship God...**

**Call to Worship**

**Do we believe? Yes, in spite of ourselves, we do believe!**

**While some follow fad and fashion, changing with the seasons in Paris, London and New York, we follow this person from Nazareth.**

**While some put their hope in a big lotto win, or chase profits at no matter what cost to family, we put our hope in loving one another as our Christ has loved us.**

**While some may give in to a sophisticated cynicism, or some fall into apathy or despair, we put out faith in the God who has given us his only true son.**

**While some may boast of their superior education, culture, race, or living standard, we boast in the sacrificial love of that Son on a Cross.**

**While some try to justify themselves by prizing fame or power, or by claiming superior morals, we allow the grace of our Lord Jesus to be our best prize.**

**Because of the Resurrected Jesus, yes, we believe in the living God by whose Holy Spirit all things are open to change and renewal. And that includes us and the church, thanks be to God!**

**Let us worship together this morning.**

**Hymn: The Day of Resurrection [https://youtu.be/bXNf\\_ftoqRg](https://youtu.be/bXNf_ftoqRg) - 249**

## **Prayer**

Thomas said: “Unless I see the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Lord God, we are often sceptical people, driven by our senses, relying on that which we can hear, see or prove.

Yet we know that you ask us to see the invisible, to trust in the spirit, to have faith. Lord, give us faith!

Sometimes we get carried away by our emotions, by wishful thinking and by popular trends that pull us in.

Lord, help us to be bold in our beliefs, but also careful as Thomas was. Move us beyond mere trust in ordinary things and open our eyes for spiritual realities.

Lord help us to hear the words “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

In Jesus’ name we pray - Amen

### **...We Listen to God’s Word...**

#### **Word of God:**

**New Testament:** John 20: 24 - 21:14

**Hymn:** At the dawning of salvation - 248

#### **Message: Doubts, Fears and Fishing**

Well here we are. The Sunday after Easter with a stay at home order from the province. The Sunday after Easter always was considered a low attendance Sunday and a low key sort of day because that is all the energy the minister had left after Holy week. This is a little more low key as we are only on Facebook this morning.

But really it is the Sunday after Easter. It is the Sunday after the festival is finished. It may have been smaller this year but there was still a delicious roast chicken dinner with a chocolate cake with Easter eggs. It was shared with two of my sons. It was festive! This week has been slowing down, taking time to think. Maybe taking time to wonder. Maybe even taking time to doubt. It is easy to get caught up in the festivities that are Easter and believe the resurrection but after it is over the mind can

do strange things. Or maybe it is not doubts about the resurrection itself. Maybe it is doubts about unfailing love and what the extent of that is. Maybe we sometimes wonder if God does not just get frustrated with us and we know we could have done better and surely God knows that as well.

All of this is to say that this is where I think the disciples find themselves on the Sunday after Easter. Their days after the crucifixion felt like a bit of a whirlwind I am sure. First they find out the tomb is empty, then they find out that Jesus is alive. The women are chattering about seeing him or going to see him in Galilee. Some of the men have seen him and are excitedly telling a story that is practically impossible.

It seems that just as fast as the room of disciples fills with surprise about the news of the resurrection, doubt also creeps into the room. Some of the disciples hear the chatter of the good news but they cannot quite grasp what has happened. Others grasp the news that Jesus is alive but they have no idea what that means for their relationship with him. They know they could have done better, should have done better at the crucifixion. There is just a whole lot of doubt in these last two chapters of the gospel of John.

Doubt and fear. They often go together don't they? Thomas has doubt about Jesus being alive. He probably has fear as well. Fear that if this news was wrong he would be heartbroken all over again. Fear that he simply could not do that roller coaster of emotions. Doubt because people do not really rise up from the dead. Well, they do if you are with Jesus but even then it did not happen all the time. Certainly, people did not rise from the dead when they were killed like a common criminal dying on a cross. Thomas wanted to be sure before he got too emotionally involved in the whole event.

I find that it is interesting that Thomas makes the demand that he must see and feel the scars on Jesus' hands and feet to believe. He is sure this is what is necessary. However, in the end, he simply needed to see Jesus to believe.

I think for us, it is more import for us to identify with Thomas' doubt than to condemn him for it. Doubt happens. I know very few people who have not doubted their faith at some point. After all, believing in a Resurrected Christ, who is with us, is almost unbelievable. I remember being at a conference with a colleague and friend. We were sitting together for breakfast and she said to me "Do you even wonder if all of this is just a story? Do you ever wonder if it is all wrong?" It was a rather big topic for the first cup of coffee for the day. I am sure I told her we all have those thoughts some

days. It happens. But there are other days when I absolutely know the risen Christ is with me. I wish I would have been able to explain Thomas in this way. Thomas doubted and Jesus did not condemn. He simply came to Thomas in the middle of his doubts and reassured him that He was very much alive.

When we allow ourselves to identify with Thomas, then we are able to see that Jesus meets him in his doubts and fears. He shows up specifically so that Thomas will not be left behind in his doubts and fears. Thomas must have been forever grateful for this gesture. He could finally join others in their excitement and joy. Jesus was risen!

Then there is Peter. Peter also has doubts. His doubts are not about the resurrection. His doubts are about forgiveness. His doubts are about Jesus' ability to continue to love him after he had been so - well so stupid. He had rejected Jesus. He had said three times that he did not know him. He had not stood up and been counted when it was important. He did not stay with Jesus through to the end like he said that he would. This was not how he saw Jesus dying - on a cross as an outcast. He just disowned Jesus.

There are so many books about the Cost of Discipleship. Detrick Bonhoffer's is one of the most popular. The cost of discipleship - the focus to stand with Jesus whatever the cost, where ever He would go. Peter claimed to be this model of disciple. He told Jesus that he would be with Jesus until the end. I think that Peter envisioned the end being more of a battle where there would be swords and knives and bravery. Not just the chaos of an arrest and Jesus going quietly with the soldiers. How do you stand with someone who gives themselves up when they did nothing wrong?

Peter just backs off, denies knowing Jesus and stays away from the crucifixion. So you can see why Peter might have doubts about Jesus and his claim of steadfast love. As far as Peter was concerned, he understood the cost of discipleship and he failed. He knew that. So no matter how exciting the resurrection new was, there was this problem. There was this broken relationship. Peter had no idea where he stood with Jesus. He had no idea what to do.

He was not alone in these doubts and fears. Many of the other disciples had scattered as well. They were so pleased that Jesus was alive but they had no idea who they were to him anymore. They knew one thing. They had not been great disciples!

So in the Gospel of John, seven of the disciples including Peter find themselves at loose ends sitting around the sea of Galilee. They had seen Jesus. They knew he was

alive. But they do not know if they belonged to Jesus any more. And if they do not belong to Jesus, they were not sure who they were or what they should do. So many doubts and so much uncertainty.

In this confusion, Peter announces that he is going fishing. A couple of other disciples go with him. Peter is sure that if there is one thing that he is good at it is fishing. He was a fisherman before he was a disciple - this was just a three year thing. He probably was fishing since he was a kid. Peter knows he can fish and it feels good to do something that comes second nature.

Of course they fail miserably at fishing as well. The disciples were not fishers of people or fish that night. They caught nothing. Not one fish! In a sea that was full of fish! How was that even possible?

Jesus meets the disciples in their disappointment and frustration. Jesus meets them while they are still fishing in their doubts of about who they are. He makes no statements about being disappointed about their decision. There is no condemnation. He tells them that they need to fish on the other side. This makes no sense but the disciples had nothing to lose by following these instructions. There must have been great delight for Jesus and the disciples as they start to haul in a catch that is so large they have to be careful not to break the nets. So many fish.

Jesus makes the disciples all night slog at fishing productive. They did not come up empty for their efforts. They caught an abundance of fish! Then Jesus invites them to join him. He invites the disciples to bring some of their fish to add to the breakfast he is making and Jesus gives thanks, blesses this event.

In this story about fishing, there is the invitation given by the resurrected Christ to participate in what he is already doing. In this situation, Jesus was making breakfast for his friends whom he knew would be hungry after fishing all night. This would not have been a difficult invitation to accept!

I take heart in these after Easter stories. Here are the disciples trying to figure out what to think and how to act. They are making the best decisions that they are able to make at the time. In retrospect, the decisions might not have been the best but they were not the worst decisions either. It strikes me that the decisions made were very normal and very human.

Jesus takes this hard, frustrating, unproductive work of fishing and transforms it into

a beautiful, joyful breakfast with great companionship. Jesus can take our hard, frustrating, unproductive work because we are not sure what we are doing and turn it into something wonderfully extraordinary.

Do you know those events where you are not sure why you are doing them? Do you know those events where you struggle to get things to come together? Then something unexpected happens and there is more joy, kindness and gratitude that seems possible. That's when you know that the Holy Spirit has come. That's when you know that Jesus has taken your humble, doubtful efforts and has created something quite extraordinary around them.

God gives us the invitation to participate in what he is doing just as he did to the disciples. He invites us even in our doubts and fears and creates more than we could have ever thought possible. This is the strange power of the crucifixion and resurrection. May we continue to hear Jesus' invitation to come and join him in the work of the very strange and wonderful Kingdom of God.

**...We Respond in Service...  
Collection & Dedication**

**Let us present to God our tithes and offerings.**

**(At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to [office@westminsterchurch.ca](mailto:office@westminsterchurch.ca). You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)**

**Prayers of the People:**

We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope—one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your Son Jesus Christ, you enter into every believing heart and make new lives that have been torn asunder by the darkness of this world... Lord, hear our prayer.....

We pray today O God that those believers who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. Help them, and us, to lay

aside the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light that you bestow upon those who actively seek you day by day. Grant that their faith and ours may be fully alive.... Lord, hear our prayer.....

We ask today, O God, for those who have lost hope and for those who have never had it. Grant to us and to those we lift before you in our hearts a new and abiding vision of what have you have done, and what you are doing, and what you will do, to save and redeem your people and indeed the creation itself. Grant, O God, that all might see and believe and discover their purpose and the purpose of all that is and all that is yet to be.... Lord, hear our prayer.....

We lift before you, O God, those who are mourning this day. We pray for the Queen and her family as they mourn the passing of Prince Phillip. May they know your presence with them. Lord we pray for others who mourning loved ones.

We pray for those who are troubled and need reassurance. Help us bring a calming presence to them. We pray for those who have many doubts and fears. Lord, help us bring your unfailing love and peace to them so that together we are able to abide in you. Lord, hear our prayer.....

We ask all this of you, O God, knowing that you are our hope and our salvation, a very present help in times of trouble, and the One whose purpose is to grant and new and abundant life to us and our world. Praise be to your name. Amen.

**Hymn:** Come to us, Beloved Stranger 262

**Benediction**

**Now as you go from here, may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.**