

There is so much about faith in God that is impossible to prove, and for some doubt becomes stronger than faith. Doubt is the natural first reaction to what we can't see or touch or have never seen before. But it is an important step because it means one is wrestling with (rather than ignoring) something new.

The first reaction to Easter was full of doubt. . They had been told Jesus was alive, but it just didn't make sense! Fear and confusion caused the disciples to hide behind the darkness of locked doors It was as if they climbed into the same tomb Jesus had emptied! When Jesus appeared, it was like a second Easter! Having freed himself from a locked tomb, Jesus returned to the *upper-room-tomb* of doubting disciples and completed what he had started earlier in the day.

Finally, the miracle of Easter made sense for those disciples. But Thomas missed this second Easter event and refused to believe. He needed proof for his eyes to be opened. He needed to touch Jesus before he would believe what his ears were hearing. His doubt is famous and represents our similar concerns as we wonder how strongly we believe. But doubt is not the opposite of faith, it is an important part of it.

One of the strongest proofs for the validity of the Christ event is the story of doubting disciples. That might seem strange, for a disciple to have doubts would seem to cast the credibility of the Easter story in doubt. And yet, I think such honesty adds to the power of the moment.

Why wouldn't they doubt? Who had ever seen a resurrection? They knew Jesus had died and the only rational response to the reports of his being alive again would be doubt. That is a natural, human response. Doubt is normal. Doubt is reasonable. Doubt is what is to be expected.

This account would be more difficult to believe if all the witnesses of the resurrection had no questions or doubts! The fact Jesus' closest followers were full of doubt gives more credibility to their eventual witness as their doubts dissolved into confident joy! Faith takes time and begins with doubt.

That is the essence of the scientific method as well. When you are looking for something, you have never seen or understood you collect evidence and the results support or contradict what is called true. The disciples were like scientists and while we always feel Jesus gathered them only to eventually share his teachings, he also gathered them to witness the

evidence he brought to earth, put it all together and have faith in the power of his gifts.

This is the time of year when our eighth graders AFFIRM the faith of their baptism. They stand up for their faith, in such a special moment. We do the same thing in worship as we recite the elements of the Apostles Creed and every time, we share our faith with someone else. Like every disciple, whether a child, youth, or adult of any age we spend a lifetime wrestling with whether doubt or faith will guide our living. To help understand that tension, consider two events that occurred several years ago on Easter Sunday.

The New York Times interviewed a Pastor of large Protestant seminary and in response to a question, she declined to affirm that Jesus really rose from the dead, commenting that much of our traditional Christian theology is an embarrassment. *She has adopted the secular line of our culture and dismisses what doesn't make sense or can't be proved.*

That same weekend, several hundred Christians in Sri Lanka were murdered in the midst of their Easter worship by Muslim extremists who were intent on ending any Christian influence in their culture. *These Christians were killed because they dared to be believers in a non-Christian culture.*

That year our Easter celebration was bookended by a Christian pastor who denied the resurrection and innocent people in Sri Lanka who were murdered because they did believe in the miracle of Easter.

What irony that in a land (like ours) where there is so much comfort and peace that many doubt the necessity of Christ and his resurrection, while in other nations, with so little earthly blessing and the threat of death simply by acknowledging Christ, faith that is stronger than doubt and fear.

This is the reality our youth will inherit. The tension between doubt and faith is real. And so, their willingness today to affirm their faith is important and a reminder of the need for each of us to daily do the same thing.

How do we walk away from Easter? What is our response? Do I leave Easter behind or carry Easter with me? Is there an Easter-effect in my living, or do I retreat to the comfort of an upper room? Easter allows us to approach death without fear, but do we approach living with similar freedom?

Thomas and the other disciples had doubts, but they allowed Jesus to lead them out of darkness and into light. Their witness has allowed Christians for 2000 years to believe what is hard to accept or prove.

Baptism calls us daily to decide whether faith or fear will guide every moment of life. Will we surrender to the easy way out and go with the flow or stand firm in the faith God offers to each of us as a gift. Remember doubt is but the beginning of faith, and fear is only the darkness that precedes Easter's dawn.

We are reminded this morning that the risen Jesus stands next to us breathing his life into ours. His words to us are simple and pure. "As the Father sends me, so I send you ... receive the gift and power of my Holy Spirit." What a breath of fresh air. What a precious gift and antidote to doubt!