

I DOUBT IT!

April 18, 2004
Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31
Pastor Don Lehmann

I tell you, I'm so excited—I can't believe what's coming my way—according to my e-mails since I got back from sabbatical my inbox has been flooded with these promises:

- Cash from Bill Gates and Microsoft
- A free trip for two to Disney World or \$5,000 cash from Disney
- A 10% take on 7 million dollars when I help Jakob Abraham set up an account
- Free computers from IBM
- \$25 gift certificate from Old Navy

But besides telling me that I'm about to get all these amazing things, the messages also implore me to be careful and to not wait too long—because if I don't meet the deadline and get my request in on time, I'll lose out on the offer. So I better get going, right?

I doubt it!

There is so much of this “it's too good to be true” stuff coming through snail mail and e-mail these days, it's ridiculous. It causes me to doubt everything.

Maybe you too have experienced the amazing reality of Internet life today. There are literally thousands of these so-called true-life stories, warnings of real life impending dangers and other informational messages circulating over the Web and amazingly many are on their 5th or 105th life cycle on the e-mail highway.

These people sending this stuff along are well-educated, highly intelligent people who are simply too trusting. They don't have a doubt meter that picks up on these things. They too often fail to say, “I doubt it!”

At the same time there are all of these people trusting every e-mail that comes along, there's also a sense in the USA of doubting everything. But we have always had doubters through out history.

Tris Speaker, a great baseball player, once said, “Babe Ruth made a big mistake when he gave up pitching.” (As you know he was one of the greatest hitters the game has known)

That great actor, *Gary Cooper*, said; “Gone with the Wind is going to be the biggest flop in Hollywood history. I'm just glad it'll be Clark Gable who's falling flat on his face and not me.” (You know, it's still the number one box office hit.)

President Grover Cleveland once said, “Sensible and responsible women don't want to vote.”

In our Gospel for today, we read the story of the most famous doubter in all of Christian history. Thomas's doubt about the identity of his Lord gave rise to the phrase “Doubting Thomas.” He wasn't willing to take the word of his fellow disciples. He needed proof.

But according to scripture, he isn't the only one who doubts. In Matthew 28: 16-17 we read: “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.”

In Luke 24 our text for last Sunday it says when the disciples heard what the women had to say about finding the tomb empty they thought it to be an idle tale and didn't believe.

Imagine that! These disciples had stood face to face with a man they had known for three years. They'd seen him perform spectacular miracles. And yet some doubted. Hard to believe, isn't it?

Well, maybe not, because we aren't much different, really. We too go through times of doubt. We try to rely on our faith, but many in times of deepest trouble turn from faith to doubt just like the disciples of Jesus.

Doubt comes at us from many places, some expected and some from left field. There are times we are so certain about something, and then some one raises a question, and we can begin to wonder and soon can be in full blown doubt about that which we were so certain. It can change pretty quickly.

What do you think Thomas must have been feeling after that amazing moment of realization that the man standing before him was indeed his Lord and Teacher? Do you think that assurance caused him to trust Jesus for the rest of his life?

Yes, I believe he did. But I also believe he continued to have questions and doubts in his own life. No amount of truth can cure all our doubts. Even Thomas continued to question. All of us experience questions and have doubts.

When Thomas experienced those last few days of Jesus' life, he experienced much doubt and pain. After that final meal, Thomas was shattered by the next events in Jesus' life—his death and crucifixion. It was just too much to handle. At the time of the crucifixion Thomas must have felt like he lost everything he'd learned from Jesus during their ministry together. It was devastating to say the least.

But Christ's grace and love moved through locked doors to find Thomas, inviting him to touch and believe. Jesus brought him from his lowest point to a place where he was ready to continue Christ's mission to the world.

What will it take to help us lose our doubts? What will bring us peace—finally and completely? What do you need from God today?

Do we also need to see a sign as did Thomas? You know, a \$5 magic 8 ball will almost certainly tell us “without a doubt” at least occasionally when we ask it one of life's tough questions. We could go to a palm reader and “no doubt” get some answers. But is that how we want to go through life, relying on a toy or a fortune teller to remove our doubts? I don't believe that will give us the peace of mind we seek. That is not the peace Jesus desires to give us.

An old man sat in his rocking chair day after day, stuck in that chair, having promised not to move himself from that spot until he saw God.

On one fine spring afternoon, the old man rocking in his chair, saw a young girl playing across the street. The little girl's ball rolled into the old man's yard. She ran to pick it up, and as she bent down, she looked up at the old man and said, “Mr. Old Man, I see you every day rocking in your chair and staring out into nothing. What is it you are looking for?”

“You're too young to understand,” replied the old man.

“Maybe” replied the young girl, “but my momma always told me if I had something in my head I should talk about it. She says to get a better understanding. My momma always says, ‘Miss Lizzy share your thoughts.’ Share, share, share, my momma always says.”

“Oh, well, Miss Lizzy child, I don't think you can help me,” grunted the old man.

“Possibly not, Mr. Old Man, sir, but maybe I can help just listening.”

“All right, Miss Lizzy child, I am looking for God.”

“Mr. Old Man, sir, you rock back and forth in that chair day after day in search of God?” Miss Lizzy responded, puzzled.

“Why, yes, I need to believe before I die that there is a God. I need a sign and I have yet to see one,” said the Old Man.

“A sign, sir? A sign?” said Miss Lizzy, now quite confused by the old man’s words. “Mr. Old Man, sir, God gives you a sign when you breath your next breath; when you smell fresh flowers. When you can hear the birds sing; when all of the babes are born. Sir, God gives you a sign when you laugh and when you cry, when you feel the tears roll from your eyes. It is a sign in your heart to hug and to love. God gives you a sign in the wind and the rainbows and the change in the seasons. All of the signs are there, but do you not believe in them? Mr. Old Man, sir, God is in you and God is in me. There is no searching because he, she or whatever may be is just here all of the time.”

With one hand on her hip and the other hand flailing about the air, Miss Lizzy continued, “Momma says, ‘Miss Lizzy, if you are searching for something monumental, you have closed your eyes because to see God is to see simple things, to see God is to see life in all things,’ That is what Momma says.”

The clear sign of Christ’s wounded hands and side can make us whole and give us the strength to respond in love. The truth of God’s redeeming and transforming love can make all things new. Come and see, touch and believe, go and be who Christ calls you to be. Without a doubt!

God, help us to keep our eyes open to see you in each other and all around us in life, that our doubts will be overcome with the peace only you can give. Amen