

Awaiting Further Evidence ~ May 1, 2011

John 20:18-31; Psalm 16 5-1-2011

This Sunday is traditionally known as “Low Sunday.” “Low” because it follows Easter Sunday, which is definitely the highest of Sundays on the Christian calendar. Or, perhaps, “low” because those who feel they need to be in church on Easter are absent the following Sunday and following Sundays. Or, “low” because we face the doubts that Thomas had within himself. It is difficult to confront his doubt because, in doing so, we are forced to face the doubt within ourselves.

Doubt is not a bad thing. When we trust another human and he or she lets us down in some way, we are hesitant to trust that person again. We are a little cautious about past performances and, if we choose to take a chance again, we often find a little doubt picking away at us. In the best of scenarios, we find that our doubt had little basis in fact and the one we have given a second chance comes through for us with flying colors. At other times we might discover that our doubts were valid and we need to make the choice whether we are able to set those doubts aside, and take a chance another time.

Doubt leads to questions, the answers to which, we hope, will clarify a situation. Questions are a good thing, even when it comes to our faith. Some will debate this and insist that we need to accept everything at face value. They think, if we do not, we weaken our faith.

I do not believe this. This might be because I was blessed enough to have a pastor, when I was growing up, who encouraged us to ask him any and every question we had. He always answered us. There were times when his answer was that, there was no answer at hand and that a particular question was in a box in his brain labeled “Awaiting Further Evidence.” As I thought about Thomas, I realized that he was doing the same thing. He was “awaiting further evidence” before he could or would draw a conclusion.

If we reflect on that first Easter, we realize, too, that the disciples the women shared the good news of Christ’s rising with, were a bit doubtful. They did not believe Mary and Mary Magdalene. They hid away in fear. Then there were a series of post-resurrection appearances by Jesus, and the disciples began to accept their story.

We are far away from that time and place. We may entertain doubts about the resurrection story. Some like to think that it happened just as the writers of the gospels noted. Others prefer to think that the spirit of Jesus returned to God. And, others doubt that it happened at all. And, yet, through all these gradations of belief, faith endures.

Faith can go on in spite of our doubts and our hesitations. Our faith lies in the fact that Jesus came or was sent to us to help us become the very best humans we can become. His humanness showed us that, through following his example, we reflect the nature of God to others and begin to establish God’s kingdom right here on earth.

When others see that living in a Christ-like manner actually works, they decide that the way we live and move and have our being is the best way for them, too. When we decide that practicing gentleness, patience, love, and forgiveness, and manage to set aside our tendency to leap to hasty judgment and condemnation of other people, we make the world around us a better place to live.

Do you have doubts about this? Just try it for a while and see what happens. See what happens to you as you gain a center of peace and calm and caring. Perhaps, that box in your brain that is “awaiting further evidence” about the possibility of transformation of others, will be pried open when you transform yourself.

That is what happened to Thomas. He saw and touched and believed. All Jesus asks of those who follow is that they gather all the evidence they need to help them follow the way set before them. The evidence of lives transformed and made whole--lives that become abundant in spirit and in faith.

The pathways to an abiding faith in the ways of Jesus are many and varied. Each of us is on a journey that is all our own. Some are on the pathway of no doubt and no questions. Others are biding their time, and “awaiting further evidence.” All ways that encourage us to grow in faith and knowledge are valid and worthy in the eyes of God.

Amen