

Year B, April 15, 2018  
3 Easter  
Christ Church, Mexia

"A huge crowd was watching the famous tightrope walker, (Charles) Blondin, cross Niagara Falls one day in 1860. He crossed it numerous times – 1,100-foot trip 160 feet above the raging waters. He not only walked across it; he also pushed a wheelbarrow across it. One little boy just stared in amazement. So, after completing the crossing (Blondin) looked at that little boy and said, 'Do you believe I could take a person across in the wheelbarrow without falling?' 'Yes, sir. I really do.' (And Blondin replied), 'Well then, get in, son.'" (Swindoll, p. 586)

We just heard Luke's account of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection. Last Sunday we heard John's account of two different appearances, and especially the account of Thomas and his doubts. Indeed, Matthew and Mark also contain examples of Christ risen and interacting with the disciples and friends, and these accounts should help us to believe in the Resurrection. But we weren't there. Maybe then, like Thomas, we may have some doubts; or maybe we do believe. But to what extent do we believe? I have seen water boil at 212 F; I have seen water freeze at 32 F. Therefore, it is not hard to accept, to believe, that these events have happened and can happen again under the same conditions. On the other hand, I've never seen anyone resurrected from the dead. I've read about it in the Bible. Maybe as someone has said: "some things must be believed before they can be seen." Seeing is often helpful to belief but acting on that belief is something different.

The disciples in today's reading were "startled and terrified, and thought they were seeing a ghost" when Jesus came among them. So much so, that Jesus asks: "why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Touch me, watch me eat fish – what do I have to do to get you to believe? So, how much harder is it for us to believe some 2,000 years later, and within the scientific culture in which we find ourselves?

And believing can really be divided into two categories according to the Rev Joseph Pagano: "One type is abstract and general; knowing it barely affects our lives. The other is specific and personal; knowing it changes everything." The first type consists of things such as: I believe George Washington was the first President of the United States; I believe that the Cardinal is the state bird of Virginia; I

believe that it will be above 70 degrees in Hawaii today. All of these things may be true, but my belief in their truth will barely impact my life.

“Martin Luther once said, ‘That upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.’ Luther was talking about what it means to have a god. He says, ‘A god means that from which we expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe in Him from the heart ... that upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.’

Here Luther provides a classic description of faith as trust. For Luther faith is more than simply believing that something is true. It is being prepared to act on that belief and relying upon it. ... To make his point Luther contrasts faith with historical knowledge. Luther says to believe in the historic reliability of the gospels is not saving faith. In his provocative way, Luther says demons are perfectly capable of believing that Jesus is the Son of God – we’ve read or heard that in scripture, or that he died on the cross and that he rose again on the third day. Rather, true faith or saving faith, for Luther, is the trust or the faith that Christ died for me and that Christ rose again for me, that Christ has accomplished his work for us and for our salvation. There is a difference between believing that certain things about God and Christ are true and having faith that those things about God and Christ are true for me, for us.” (Pagano) This is the second type of belief, the type that changes our lives, that makes us want to be better than we are, to live a life of purpose that makes some difference in the world, and that promotes the kingdom of God.

In last week’s scripture, when Thomas saw Jesus and Jesus said to him, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe,” Thomas didn’t say OK, that’s cool, I believe it’s you. I can see that now. No. He said, “My Lord and my God!” That’s what Luther is talking about. This is the kind of belief, faith, trust, that makes all the difference. If believing in God or Christ doesn’t affect us more than the belief that the Cardinal is the state bird of Virginia, then our belief in God lacks genuine trust. In other words, it is one thing to say, I believe you can take someone in a wheelbarrow across Niagara Falls on a tightrope without falling and being the one who actually steps into the wheelbarrow.

Jesus was telling his disciples today, and us, to get into the wheelbarrow. Rather than being frightened by so many things in this world, by having doubts this Easter season, may we exhibit that kind of faith, that kind of belief, and trust in God and in the risen Christ! And may it be seen in our actions time and time again.

In the name of God, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.