

**The Church: Trusting in God**  
**Pastor Jim Cords**  
**July 24, 2022**

This Sunday's texts:

Psalm 46:1-7

James 5:13-16

John 20:24-31

The holy gospel for this day is John chapter 20:

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was among them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord, it is by your Spirit and through hearing the good news of the Gospel that we believe. And so we ask you, today, give us faith in you, strengthen the faith we have, and allow it to make a difference in the way we live our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Psalm 46 begins with these words from our Old Testament. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."<sup>1</sup> We're talking today about faith, saving faith. We're not going to be addressing all the truths about who God is and what we believe about the character of God, but we will be talking about some things. Right from the beginning, I want you to see in the words of the psalmist an acknowledgment that faith isn't coming because God has laid out an easy road. The element of faith that's being talked about here shows the need for shelter, a fortress, for protection. He's a very present help *in trouble*. You see sometimes we have this notion. I don't have any idea where it comes from because it's certainly not biblical. We have this idea that if we put our trust in God that we won't need help, as opposed to recognizing that God *is* our help in

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 46:1

trouble. So it isn't a matter of looking around and seeing evidence of God through the peace that exists in our lives but recognizing the presence of God to bring us through both times of peace and times of hardship, and recognizing that God is faithful.

The psalm goes on, “[t]he Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”<sup>2</sup> One of the things we talk often about, especially in the Pentecost season of the year when we're focusing not just on the life of Jesus which is the first half of the year, but on the life of the church, is that a part of what it means to be the church is that we are the dwelling place of God. God actually promises to abide with us, in us, and through us. We are as the Church in that very definition because God is present in his people. That's what makes us who we are as the people of God.

And then we turn to our epistle lesson today and we hear these words, in trouble, pray.<sup>3</sup> A part of the substance of faith is knowing that we have a God to whom we can turn. Now I don't know about you, but if I'm driving down the street and my light starts blinking that I need to get gas, I usually kind of think about how much further I have to go and where the gas station is and I can fill up with gas or in some of your cases, a place to plug in. I don't know often pray when that alarm goes off – “Oh God, please help me find power soon enough.” Although I have been known to stretch the distance which does, in fact, often bring that prayer. So often we will rely on our own experiences, our own belief that we can solve whatever the challenge might be that is in front of us and some of us reserve our prayers for those problems that seem too big for us. What I want to say to you is there is no problem too big or too small in which we recognize the presence of God in our lives to lead and guide us through it. God cares about his people.

So when we're talking about faith, just as I talked to the children earlier, one of the fundamental elements that is not necessarily found in the clarity with our creeds is that God loves us. As I talked about last week, it's not just people like us that God loves. God actually loves all of his creation. All the people of the world are loved by God. Why do I make such a big deal of that? Well, it's because too often when we look in the mirror, we know our brokenness. We know the things we've done wrong. We know even the thoughts of our minds that don't align with what we know to be God's will and we think less of ourselves. We assume that God, therefore, thinks less of us. Sometimes we even say out loud, “I

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 46:7

<sup>3</sup> James 5:13

don't know if God could love me.” If you don't know if God could love you, then it's very hard to believe that he would give his life for you. It's very hard for you to believe then that he wants the very best for you, that he desires to give you purpose and gifts and abilities to make a difference in the world and to bring honor and glory to his name in your life.

While there are very important theological truths about God and what he has done, the foundation of his love for us is the building block of that theology, having personal implications for us, to give us a sense of hope, to give us a sense of calling, to give us a sense of direction. Part of what we say we believe about God is that God is god, that is, that God is sovereign. While we say that, if we say we believe that, but then act as if we are sovereign in our own lives, that we're free to do whatever we want to do, we can be our own person, then, maybe, we don't understand what sovereign means. Because, again, a part of the reality that God is Sovereign means that he's sovereign over us, over you, and the appropriate, worshipful response to a sovereign God is the submission of our lives. I'm not stating that as a law. I'm just stating it as a natural logical fact of the truth of who God is and who we are. So when we know that about God, we turn to him. We trust in him. We pray to him.

So we have this text, this pretty famous text about doubting Thomas. Unfortunate timing on Thomas' part that has now laid this label on him for eternity – “Doubting Thomas” as opposed to just “Didymus Thomas” because he wasn't there to see. He wasn't there to experience the risen Christ when the other disciples did, but, of course, Jesus did not leave him out. He came again and made sure that Thomas would experience the very thing he needed to experience in order to believe in him. Thomas said, “I will not believe unless I see and touch” So what's the first thing Jesus says after “Peace be with you!” when he shows up in his resurrected self? See. Touch. Believe. No longer be doubting, but believe. Jesus makes himself known to Thomas in the resurrection, so that Thomas might believe in him.

Then the text goes on and says “You have seen and believe. Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe.”<sup>4</sup> I think that's probably us. Unless you happen to have seen with your eyes the risen Christ, then, you know, power to you, God bless you, but most of us believe from the witness of those who saw, rather than seeing ourselves. Thomas was, of course, one of those witnesses.

So we hear this phrase to Thomas and I hope we hear this phrase for ourselves. Stop doubting. Believe.

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<sup>4</sup> John 20:29

Now I want to pause there for a moment. One of my favorite scriptures is the story of the father with his sick child who wants the disciples to heal this child, but they don't. Jesus shows up and the father says I'm not sure why they can't heal him, but I believe you can heal him; please heal my son. Jesus says if you believe. This is the prayer that I think is so powerful. This father says "I believe; help my unbelief!"<sup>5</sup> Anybody here has any doubts associated with their faith? Any little sort of nudges or something? I believe; help my unbelief! it's not about a confident witness that proclaims "I believe!" As a matter of fact, Peter did that. Near the end of (the gospel according to) John, as we move from chapter 13 to chapter 14. in chapter 13, Peter says "I will die for you" and Jesus says even "before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you're going to deny three times that you've even know me."<sup>6</sup> Don't be anxious because I go to the Father. I will take care of what falls short in your beliefs.

There is a famous story that is an analogy, not a truth. It's about this tightrope walker that walks across the tightrope of Niagara Falls. I don't know if you've ever seen actual images of that. [Shows image of a tightrope walker.] You can see across the center of the picture here horizontally the long pole that allows the walker on the tightrope to have balance. The story goes something like this. Imagine you're at Niagara Falls and some crazy bloke walks across a tightrope with a wheelbarrow full of potatoes. He comes across the other side and he dumps the potatoes. He asks this question "who believes that I could carry them across the tightrope in the wheelbarrow?" Oddly enough, people do the calculation and think well if he could carry all those potatoes, he can probably carry me and they go "yeah, I believe that." Then he says "have a seat."

Our witness is that forgiveness and eternity are ours through our faith, through our belief in Jesus. That isn't a statement that says if you just say the right things or if you would believe the right things happened historically, that's the faith it's talking about. Rather, the belief it's talking about you is putting your trust in God for your forgiveness, for your eternity. Again, a very difficult thing to believe if you don't believe God loves you in the first place. But it's not just a historical reference to facts. It's a putting our trust in God.

Now sometimes we look at this backward. I've heard a number of people say who are struggling with their faith, either before they've come to Christ or even later after they've been a believer for a while, I've heard some people say "you know, I'm not sure I have enough faith" They're really looking in the mirror

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 9:14-24, ESV for the unbelief quote

<sup>6</sup> John 13:37-38, NLT

and it's like how much do I weigh? Let me weigh my faith and see how much is there in me, as if faith is something that is a part of my willpower, a part of my deductive reasoning, the pros and the cons. And yes, the pros have enough, so I believe today.

The truth of the matter is faith is rooted in the One in whom you have faith. Faith comes in us when we see that God is faithful. As God makes himself known to us, the Holy Spirit creates works, faith in us. The word in Greek, *pisteuo* is to believe, to trust, to entrust. Listen to this, it describes the act of believing or trusting something ***on the basis of its truthfulness and reliability***. Faith is about who God is. Faith is about what God does for you.

Happened to be out doing a little bit of stargazing last night with Shelley's husband and Shelly and a few others. They were pointing out some things in the night sky. You can't do that very long without thinking about God being the creator of the universe. Sometimes when we think about God as the creator of the universe, God as sovereign, we think of ourselves as awfully small and inconsequential.

Do you believe that God is faithful and reliable? And this is harder - do you believe that his love for you is faithful and reliable? I asked that question because so often we had a gut response in the church of saying "well, yes, of course." But we also have this problem when we are aware of our own sinfulness and our own need to repent and we can sometimes even say to ourselves I wonder if God will forgive me for this, again. When we know the faithful reliability of God, the answer to that question is "of course" Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. So we turn in repentance and receive that forgiveness and love afresh.

Then there's this about that verb, *pisteuo*, that Greek word for to believe. It occurs 241 times in the New Testament. Most of these indicate belief in the truth of a reality or a person. In other words, the substance of our faith is outside of us. What happens to create faith in us is that we see and hear of the goodness of God. It's a part of why we need to be sharing the gospel with others because the gospel has the power through the Holy Spirit to instill and bring forth faith in others. We're not just trying to convince them to think it's right. We're trying to help them to see the wonder and the goodness of who God is, of who Jesus is, and to recognize that's for us. That's for me. That's for you. That's for the world.

I can be confident in that so that I don't have to have what some of our friends would call good old Lutheran guilt. I know others call it good old Catholic guilt or good old Presbyterian guilt. We seem to be pretty good at guilt. The gift of

salvation and the gift of faith is to wipe that fear away, to wipe that guilt away, to be reminded that God is faithfully and reliably for us. So when we say for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever trusts in him, whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, we not only believe that so that we can speak to people about the wonder and goodness of God's love, but we hear it in another way. It's for me. It's for you. God truly fully loves and is committed to you.

I remember hearing over and over again when I was growing up, often at Good Friday services, this witness which I struggled to believe, but now proclaim with faith, is this. Even if you were the only person in the world who was a sinner, Jesus would have died for you. It didn't take the whole world being fallen for God to go "okay, like now I realize. I could let that couple of go, but now I can't. That's just too many, so now I've got to do something about it."

It's about recognizing the truth of God's love for you, that he created, knows everything about you - yes all of it, and still would give his life for you. Then we hear afresh as the church, as the people of God, as the ones who bear witness to this good news of God's character, of God's actions on behalf of the world and we see at the end of John's gospel these words. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name."<sup>7</sup> Now that's a basic gospel message which we need to proclaim now and then in its simplicity. But it's also a reminder to us that we are the church and that God's presence in us is also God's presence through us. Because I will tell you, there are a number of people out there and maybe some in here who have some doubts about that. Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> John 20:31