

2 Easter

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Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 5:27-32 Peter tells the Sanhedrin that he must preach Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:4-8 John announces 'peace to you', and describes the grandeur of Christ

John 20:19-31 Jesus addresses Thomas' doubts, sent them out, empowered them

The Gospel passage takes us to the evening of Easter Day. The disciples who had been scattered by Jesus' arrest and trial are gathered again. They were a community who needed to be together; who trusted each other. This story focuses on the doubt of Thomas, who needed proof before he could believe that Jesus was alive. He ended up with more than enough faith.

Let's look at some of the times Jesus commented on people's faith:

Matt 8:13 - Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

⁵When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." ⁷And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed." ⁹For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹²while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

Matt 9:22 - A Woman Healed

²⁰Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." ²²Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

Matt 9:29 - Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

²⁷As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." ²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." ³⁰And their eyes were opened.

There is no hint in these stories that these people looking for healing knew that Jesus was God. Jesus did not ask a single one of them, "What is your position on me being the Son of God?"

The centurion recognized that Jesus was someone of authority.

The bleeding woman recognized that Jesus had healing powers.

The two blind men recognized him as the descendant of King David, and agreed that he had the power to heal them.

None of these people recognized Jesus' work as a revelation of God's love. Or that Christ was there to make payment for humankind's sins.

But Jesus saw something that led him to say that their faith had made them well.

Insight about this comes from James 2:14-17. ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Faith without works is dead. Faith has to include action; faith is about doing something. It's NOT about intellectual understanding, about figuring it all out. Faith is about taking action in life based on the premise that God loves us. It's about living according to the premise that Christ is exactly who he says he is.

How much faith did Jesus say it takes to move a mountain? The size of a mustard seed. (Matt 17:20) Thomas had doubts, but in the midst of doubt, he had enough faith to come to Jesus for proof, and then to proclaim his teacher to be not just alive, and not only his Lord, but that he was indeed God.

Thomas wasn't there for Jesus' anointing with the HS, but even so, there is no doubt that he received the power of strong faith from the HS. The passage from Acts shows how bold Peter became in his faith, speaking to the Temple Sanhedrin, who had given him strict orders not to teach about Jesus; "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

How do you and I find the strength to make peace with someone who has hurt us; with mustard seed faith. How do you and I face serious illness or even death of people we love; with mustard seed faith. How do you and I take on a responsibility that pushes us past the limits of our experience; with mustard seed faith.

Jesus doesn't require perfect faith from us in order to work in our lives. He only asks that whatever faith we have, we not just claim it, but use it: use it to serve willingly and lovingly (read to a best friend in ICU); to care about each other and about the powerless (Ralph-others need \$); to live our life feeling 'sent' by Jesus to make a difference. THAT is the belief that empowers what we do and why we do it. The story of Thomas is, after all, a message of encouragement.

May our Lord Jesus Christ accept our faith, at whatever level we can offer it to him today; and from that offer of faith, may he use us to bring his healing grace and peace into every one of our relationships. Amen.