



Second Sunday in Easter Sunday, April 8th, 2018

Blind Belief?



The readings on this Second Sunday in the Easter season, address the ancient and modern question of belief, belief in Christ. In the ancient world, intellectual doubt was not looked upon well. The charge of atheism, of disbelief in the gods, was a dangerous one. In the medieval period and still later, modern and contemporary periods, doubt was and is seen differently: as part of a legitimate intellectual process in Christian growth. But belief is never just an intellectual, mind-thing. In Hebrew thinking, belief has to do most fundamentally with practical living: the way we live. This is certainly the approach that Jesus takes and one affirmed by the apostle Paul: belief is a doing thing.

OUR GATHERING

Announcements

Greeting

Christ is risen!

Sing a new song!

Sing praise to our still-laughing Easter God;

who has rolled away the limitations of yesterday.

Immerse your anxiety and despair in the fountain of resurrection;
for God takes ordinary things;

and makes them extraordinary.

We turn our eyes to the Paschal Candle

We light the candle knowing that our faith in Jesus
is sometimes strong,
sometimes elusive,
sometimes seething with doubt.

By doubting we come to inquiry,
by inquiry we come to truth.

Questions from the scaffolding, from which my own faith is built.

Easter is the season when we thoughtfully celebrate

Christ breaking the bounds of death and hell

Christ breaking the limitations of yesterday

**Hymn: Crown him with many Crowns (TiS 228, Diademata,
George Job Elvey)**

A Prayer Confessing our Struggle in Belief in Resurrection

Our Gospel reading for the day centres upon the story of the disciple Thomas. Usually the story is taken to infer that Thomas doubts the historical truth of Jesus' resurrection. There is however something in addition to this: namely, Thomas' scepticism because he sees no evidence of a resurrected world around him. Indeed, he and his companions are hold-up in a room in fear. Thomas is clear that for Jesus' resurrection to be believable, there must be tangible signs of a new world, not just

the continuation of the old one: new people with new ways of thinking and acting, new cultures that move beyond self-defensiveness, new faith that does more than reinforce a sense of insider/outsider, and new society, where people may all breathe together.

‘Sometimes We Wonder’.

The creation is alive with the life and glory of God
.....yet sometimes we wonder

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Wonder whether we have the heart to keep going.
The way ahead seems unclear
and so much is changing around and within us...

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Wonder whether we have the imagination to keep hoping,
when the pain and struggles of our hurting world catch at our
throats and draw us into despair...

***After the music has died away and
we are faced with the challenges of a new day
...sometimes we wonder...***

Then into our weariness new life is breathed.
Into our helplessness fresh dreams are poured.

But we still wonder...

Amen

The Peace

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Sunday Morning Group (SMG)

The kids leave us for work and fun.

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

A Way into the Readings concerning Belief

Although I'm a very emotional man, I just can't have blind faith; I have to find out for myself.

David Suchet – Christian Actor

The meme for blind faith secures its own perpetuation by the simple unconscious expedient of discouraging rational inquiry.

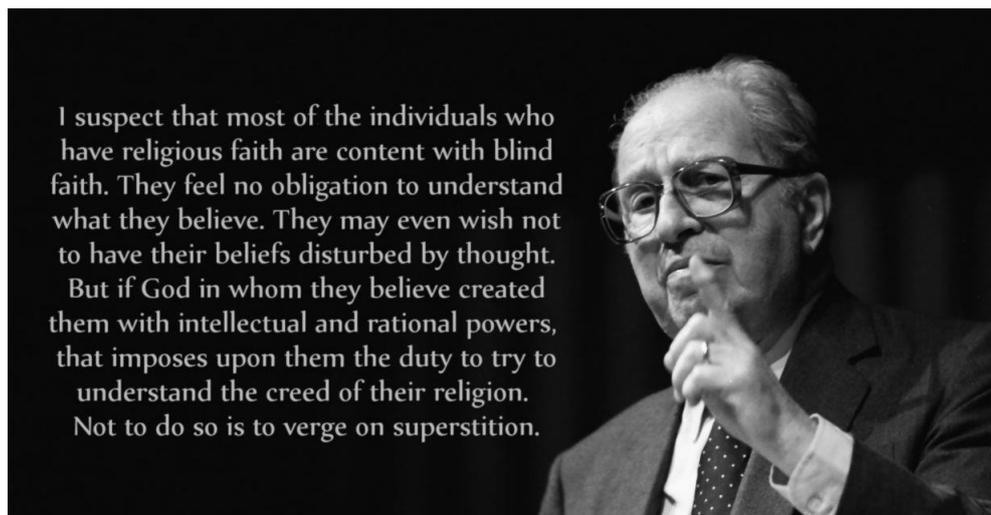
Richard Dawkins - atheist

Dawkins considers that all faith is blind faith, and that Christian and Muslim children are brought up to believe unquestioningly. Not even the dim-witted clerics who knocked me about at grammar school thought that.

Terry Eagleton – philosopher and Christian

To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle.”

George Orwell – British novelist



Mortimer Adler – American theologian and philosopher

Acts 4:32-37 (Good News Translation)

This is an ideal scene, which would have warmed the hearts of those who knew the philosophical ideals of the time. Shared resources, no one in need. It was an ideal also hailed and lived out in some Jewish communities, especially the so-called Essene movement who had connections with the group which

lived by the Dead Sea and whose library was discovered only last century in the caves. This was a kind of protest against the dominant regime which was marked by a system of what was called *patrocinium*, where people sought out security under the protection of a wealthy man ‘higher up the food chain’. In the early Christian community, the mainly poor Christians, supported each other, freeing them from their dependence on the *patron and the system*. This was grounded in the proclamation which declared God's goodness reached out to all, the good and the bad, and on the basis of love and community promised good news for the poor. In short, grace has social implications and consequences.

³² The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God poured rich blessings on them all. ³⁴ There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned fields or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale, ³⁵ and turn it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed according to the needs of the people.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

John 20:19-31 (Good News Translation)

This is the famous story of “doubting Thomas”. Reading early church history, the Church Fathers had little tolerance for Thomas: he was seen as the incorrigible doubter. In John’s Gospel, Thomas is seen with more nuance. He is a doubter, he is a dubious figure, but he also finally confesses Jesus as Lord and God. In John’s Gospel, then, Thomas is seen as ambiguous: he gets it right but he is not exemplary. In John’s Gospel, there is an investment in higher faith that believes without proof (20:29). Thomas is one who requires proof. In the medieval and modern worlds, proof for the existence of God is what has preoccupied the world of theology. In these changed circumstances, Thomas receives gentler treatment, Thomas is read more sympathetically.

¹⁹ It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting and believe!”

²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”

³⁰ In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ But these have been written in order that you may believe^[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Yours be the glory (TiS 380, Maccabeus, Adapted George Frederick Handel)

Some thoughts...

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

The one who prays after a series of petitions says, "Raise us Lord" and the people respond, "Make us a risen people".

Closing Hymn: Love Divine (TIS 217, Blaenwern 590, William Penfro Rowlands)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is risen!

We see reality through resurrection

We seek to live lovingly, truthfully, inclusively

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Sung Blessing: Father bless us as we go (TiS 781, Kookaburra, Robin Mann) We sing twice

Musical Postlude

Organist