

## **“I’m a Believer”**

Second Sunday of Easter  
Saturday and Sunday, April 7 & 8, 2018  
The Reverend Jennifer A. Hope-Tringali  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

John 20:19-31

Let us pray:

"I'm a believer" - what do you think of?

Then I saw her face, now I'm a believer  
Not a trace of doubt in my mind  
I'm in love  
I'm a believer, I couldn't leave her if I tried

Depending on when popular, you might think Song by

Monkees or if  
you are more a  
Shrek fan





Smashmouth's version

- Fun facts: Did you know? #1 hit 1966; Songwriter Neil Diamond; Monkees second single; sang but didn't play; producers doubted could "play like a real band"

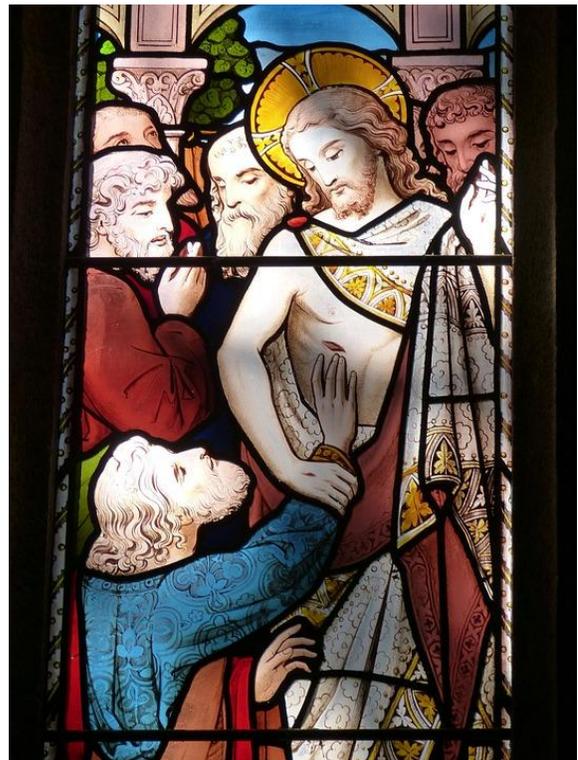
The "believer" in this song lost all doubt when they saw "her face."

Thomas declared he would believe when he **saw** the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, and put his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in Jesus' side.

Greek more vivid; **STICK** his fingers and **THROW** his hand or he will **NEVER** believe

Thomas was giving human conditions for believing

Have you ever done that? God I will believe in you if only you will.....If I do this or that, then I expect you will do \_\_\_\_\_ for me. If we are honest with ourselves, we have probably all said or at least thought that in our conversations with God.



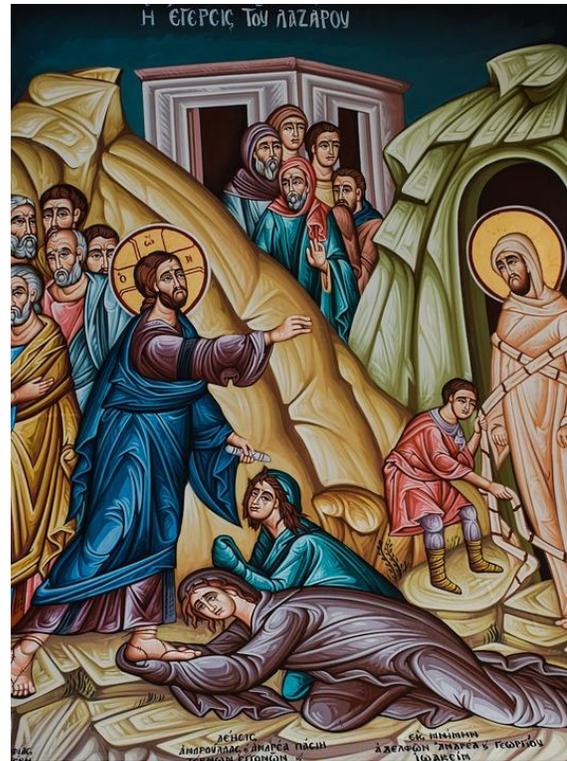
I wanted to assure God of my belief if only God would do this or that for me.

Who was this Thomas? Thomas was a character.... He has been known throughout time as "Doubting Thomas," which can lead you and I to believe he may have been timid or uncertain about Jesus. But what do we know about this Thomas from John's gospel?

1. Earlier in John's Gospel, it was Thomas who declared, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." = refers to Lazarus dying and Jesus telling disciples they are going there to the dead Lazarus so that the disciples might believe; Thomas bold, "LET'S GO!"
2. Now we hear that the disciples are hiding in upper room that is locked; afraid of being associated with Jesus, but Thomas was outside

Thomas not timid, but rather seeming fearless;

I want to take us back to Easter Sunday and the gospel reading from John that we heard. Can you remember who was the first to see the Risen Jesus?



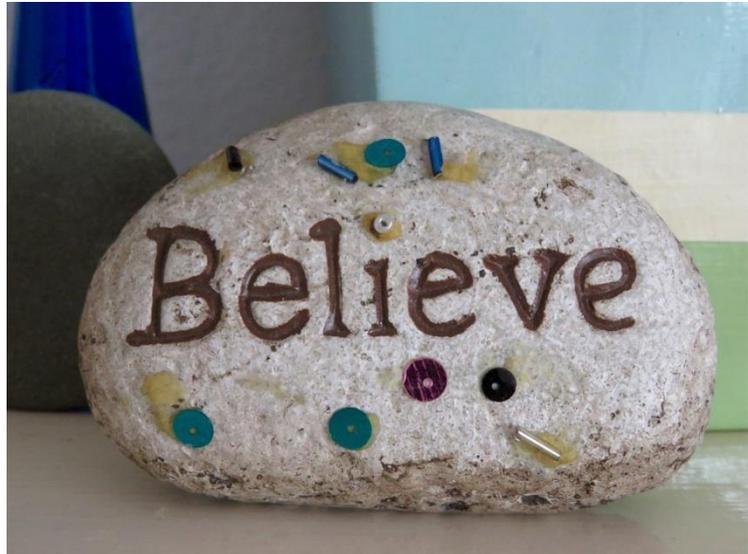
Mary Magdalene

Parallels between Thomas and Mary Magdalene post-resurrection

- Both are out and about, not locked away hidden from view of authorities
- Both want to touch the risen Jesus; neither of them ends up actually touching Jesus, but they want to

- Both end up becoming believers declaring Jesus as Lord and God, even though they don't completely understand the resurrection after Jesus speaks to them

Jesus' words spoken to both Mary and Thomas, words spoken by the incarnate WORD lead to their believing. This is where the Greek geek in me screams.....Poor Thomas! Because in the Greek, the word for doubt is not used here at all. Jesus actually says to Thomas, "Stick your finger here and see my hands. Thrust your hand out and put it into my side. Stop your unbelieving and believe."



We get so focused on Thomas in this passage, when it is actually about God and what God has already done for us. Jesus died on the cross and conquered death; our sins are forgiven, and we have been promised eternal life.



Jesus says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And then he breathes on them the essence of the Holy Spirit, equipping them to go and make disciples.

Breath is a big deal in the Bible; 2 times Genesis and Ezekiel reference

Just as Jesus breathed on the disciples, you have been breathed on in your baptism. You have been given the gift of faith, just as Thomas was.

*I have a question for you.....*

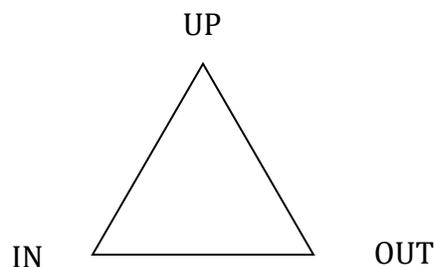
What is our mission statement, Trinity?

### ***United and Empowered to Worship, Connect, Serve***

We are United by our faith in Christ and Empowered by the Holy Spirit. We gather as we are now to worship; we connect with each other and with those we meet every day out in the world around us to serve our neighbor.

You all know that I am here with you as an interim.... a liminal space between pastors who you call to serve you. I have almost been here one year, and my time will inevitably be drawing to a close. However, I will be continuing to serve you in all things mission-oriented in my role as director of evangelical mission with the synod.

In my sermons here at Trinity, I am usually very highly invitational with you, inviting you into God's grace. And I hope you are hearing a message of grace today, but I also hope that we have built deep enough relationships with each other that I can now issue a challenge to you as well. This challenge is a message of grace to the world and involves you.



My challenge for you is to put an OUT lens on all you do. When you think about worship, or programs, or initiatives, or faith formation, put on OUT glasses.... why? Because that's what Jesus modeled to his disciples.

We heard in our scripture reading today that Jesus said to the disciples, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." We gather at Trinity to worship and learn, and we are sent; gather and send; gather and send; this is Jesus' model for us. Jesus had OUT glasses on all of the time. He went up mountains to pray and be refreshed by God, but why? To be sent back out into the crowds. Jesus spent time with his inner circle, teaching his disciples, but for what reason? So, they would all be sent to continue that teaching of love and grace and gospel. Jesus went OUT into the margins, to those the religious institutions were not reaching.

I am not saying that within our Trinity family that we do not need to care for those right here who are experiencing pain and loss and brokenness; but what I am saying is that there are a whole lot more OUT there who are not yet connected with this faith community or any faith community.



When I was struggling as an adoptive mom in despair questioning my faith, I needed to gather with disciples of Jesus. I needed to borrow their courage and hope when I had none. I am standing here today as your pastor, because of disciples who were sent....out of their church buildings....to me in my confusion and suffering.

Come here and gather Trinity and worship our God on high; worship Christ the King, the Christus Rex, the one in the red robe hanging in the nave. But then as you turn to leave this space, envision a different kind of cross hanging right there (on that wall as you exit).

A wooden cross that is painstakingly hand-carved and stained with sweat. One that shows nail holes in Jesus' hands, a gash in his side, and a worn and suffering Jesus' hanging from it gazing down at you.....looking to YOU to be sent.



Why? As a reminder of all the people out there suffering who need YOU to go and be like Christ to them. After all, his disciples recognized the resurrected Christ by the marks on his hands and side. The resurrected Christ's body had scars, holding in tension Good Friday and Easter Sunday, because that is the reality of our world and what a disciple is sent to wrestle with.

You and I....WE WERE REBORN in baptism to be sent.

Jesus told Mary to go

Jesus told his disciples to go.

And Jesus tells us to go.



Go to places of brokenness, pain, and suffering, and bring hope, new life, love, and forgiveness. Blessed are those who have not seen and come to believe. You and I are now active participants in this story, the Easter story....

Forgiveness and eternal life have been promised to you.

Stop your unbelieving and Believe!

Go in peace.

YOU are sent.

Find the broken.

Go and forgive.

Go and love.

Go and build relationship and serve your neighbor that they might believe.

Because now you and I are little Christ's to the world.

Reveal Christ in your love and grace to ALL the world.

Persevere until THEY say: Thanks be to God for Christ shown through YOU!

Amen