

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Mr. Gary Lewis, Preacher
2nd Sunday of Easter
April 23, 2017

Good morning and welcome.....I am happy to announce that we are going to make history today. You see before you leave everyone is going to be given a quiz about my sermon consisting of 10 true /false questions, 10 multiple choice questions and one essay question so please pay attention and you may want to take notes. In today's Gospel, we talk about Thomas when he told the other disciples First, I must see the nail scars in his hands and touch them with my finger. I must put my hand where the spear went into his side. I won't believe unless I do this. A rather bold statement wouldn't you say. Why is he separating himself from the others? Kind of going off and doing his own thing so to speak. What was going through his mind when he spoke these words? What caused him say them in the first place more important how is Jesus is going to react? Is Jesus going to be mad, is he going to be disappointed? Let's look at some of the possibilities for Thomas's response. Was it a question of not trusting what the other disciples were telling him....not sure? Was Thomas just expressing his independencewe don't know? Is it a question of Thomas just not understanding what he was hearing and needed to see proof with his own eyeswe will never know? How many of us sitting here today can relate to what Thomas is going through? Is Thomas questioning his ability to understand what he was being told? Or better yet what is going to happen to me when Jesus finds out? The reason isn't important the one thing we can be sure of that Thomas is revealing himself as being human just like everyone sitting here today. And as such he is not perfect. You know we humans need to be able to look, touch, smell and taste in order to believe and let's be honest with one other there are times when we do all of the above and still don't believe....how sad. Let's look at the reaction that Jesus has when he returns the following week to see Thomas. First...what he doesn't do....he does not berate Thomas he does not belittle Thomas. Instead Jesus shows compassion, understanding and love that Thomas needs at that moment and thus reassures Thomas that it is ok.

I believe Jesus desires to inspire us when he says "The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the ones who are really blessed" What keeps us from having that faith without having to see Jesus? I believe the main culprit is fear. And isn't fear born of the unknown? If allowed fear can be very detrimental to us how ever in the same breath it can also inspire us to greatness. I'm sure everyone here today at one time or another has experienced fear in their lives some more than others. Be it as a child afraid of thunder or an adult who has just been diagnosed with cancer and says to themselves now what do I do? One of my heroes is Franklin Roosevelt in his 1933 inauguration speech he said "All we have to fear is fear its self" his words still hold true to this day. I suggest to you to go home and read his full speech it's very inspiring. Let us look at the word faith from a different angle. First...what is faith? We can't hold it, can't see it, and can't smell it and we can't taste it. There are no right or wrong answers in defining it.

There are an infinite number of meanings for it. Faith is the foundation for which everything is built upon. I am sure if I were to go around the church today and asked everyone here what your definition was I would get a different answer from everyone and that's ok. The question I pose.....does your faith continue to grow.....are you open to other views and definitions of what faith means to others and do you respect them? To me faith means being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. It is knowing that I am loved unconditionally beyond my ability to grasp and comprehend it. Let me explain BEING SURE OF WHAT WE HOPE FOR..... I trust our Father to provide everything I will ever need, I remind myself from time to time that God knows me best and what I need. It has been my experience over the years that when God gives me a gift or answers my prayer it is always far greater than I ever could have imagined.

“AND CERTAIN OF WHAT WE DO NOT SEE” I know that my Father is with me.....you see just over three years ago I was sitting at our kitchen table in tears feeling my world had come to an end again when I asked God to come into my life and take over after years of trying own my own doing nothing but failing miserably time after time. Now I can feel his presence in my life every day. Knowing that I am always ok and never have to worry. If for some reason, you're not sure of your faith.....that's ok. The good news is God does not complicate things. There are no requirements to meet. No deposit needed. It's simple.....all we have to do is ask our Father for guidance.

Let me change direction just a bit. As I said a minute ago faith is the corner stone in our relationship with God. So let us build on that and look at some of the other elements involved that can help us grow and deepen the relationship that we with our father.

The element of tithing.....very important...enables God's work to be accomplished, however I know if I continue down this road I wouldn't finish up until afternoon and Mother Barbara would fuss with me so I will save that one for another time.

The element of loving our fellow man.....very important...can be a bit challenging.....however it doesn't cost you anything and yet the rewards will come back to you tenfold guaranteed. It does not require you to move to India and build a village. There are three parts involved... love, respect, and perhaps the hardest one...forgiveness. One of the greatest gifts that we can give to our fellow man is to acknowledge their existence perhaps with a smile perhaps wishing them a good day or to extend your appreciation for a job well done. Very powerful actions my friends. Next respect.... just because someone may look a little different, perhaps speak with an accent or have a perception of life that you may not understand They also need to be accepted for who they are and not to be judged. They are a child of God just like you. And when it comes to forgiving someone just remember God forgives you why should you be special and be excused from forgiving others.

The element of giving thanks and praise. You might say they go hand and hand. There many gifts and blessings that come from our father every day. The first and greatest gift is the gift of

life for without it we are nothing but a pile of dust just gathering more dust. After all we say thank you to the person behind the counter who waited on us. Don't you think it's appropriate before you check your cell phone in the morning to take just a minute to thank God for the gift of life he gave to you today? After all he is the one who gave you life and put you on this earth in the first place. Also, very important let's not forget to praise our Father as well for all of his blessings. Everyday God gives us so many opportunities that come in all sizes and shapes. Let me give you an example of what I'm trying to say..... you see the opportunity to give today's sermon to share my thoughts and perspectives about Thomas was a gift from our Father. I never expected this, this wasn't a goal that I have been working on and no I didn't give Mother Barbara twenty bucks to do this. You may choose to call it a blessing, opportunity, miracle or any other name you may feel is appropriate. I just know that that I am very thankful to have everyone here today to share my joy. The joy that embraces me whenever I receive a gift from God is overwhelming. And to give praise to our Father is just another way of acknowledging his gift.

As I begin to close I want you to make a promise to yourself. That promise is.....if you ever find yourself in Thomas's place, questioning, not believing, wanting proof, don't panic, and don't fret. Remember my friends Jesus did not condemn Thomas for needing to see him nor is he going to condemn you. Just turn to Jesus and he will help you. It is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength to ask for help. After all, that is what Jesus wants us to do?

Our relationship with our father is a living breathing entity constantly moving, changing and growing. It is our responsibility to make sure it is fed and watered so it can grow. I want to share a brief story with you about God's grace and how he can change lives. I am sixty-six years old.....be it a young sixty-six mind you.

I know my age doesn't show and you never would have guessed how old I am. Thank you. I don't know when or how my interpretations were formed, self – imposed perhaps that said for over half of my life I thought in order to have a relationship and to be accepted by our Father one had to be perfect in every way so that is what I strived for. Boylet me tell you that really work out to well it was like trying to fix a leaking boat in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay no sooner would I get one hole fixed and a second hole would pop open then by the time I got second hole patched the first one would pop open again and a third.... and a forth..... and so on. This is how I spent most of my life trying to patch and repair all the holes in my life try as I may I just couldn't do it. However along with my many bruises I received from hitting bottom I also learned many invaluable lessons. As my relationship with our Father grew and changed over the time I learned God loves us imperfections and all it doesn't matter. Today instead of striving to be perfect I strive to serve and please our Father. Remember everyone the day you came into this world you received the love of God.... period. What you do with that love is your decision, it has something to do with that free will thing you know the freedom to make our own choices we all received at birth. We are the ones that have to take the leap and do the asking. All God ever wants is the chance to get to know us.....please give him the opportunity.