

Called to Build Trust
A Sermon on John 20:19-31 by the Rev. Philip Major
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ April 24, 2022

Thomas' relationship with Jesus points to a fundamental aspect of Christian discipleship. We are called to build relationships of trust.

Let's consider a few of the details of the scriptural story. The first verse tells about Jesus' first appearance among the disciples on the evening of the day of the resurrection. The disciples were fearful, for obvious reasons. Following the death of their master and leader, they were fearing for their own lives and safety. The disciples had locked the doors, the scripture says, 'for fear of the Jews.' Read literally and without any interpretation this makes no sense, since the disciples were also Jews. When we consider the context, we understand that the disciples had locked the doors for fear of the religious authorities.

As we continue in the passage we get to the place where Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Then Jesus sent them out into the world to preach Jesus' message of forgiveness. As a result, this passage is often described as the 'little Pentecost', or the 'first Pentecost'. Jesus was sending the Holy Spirit among his disciples, empowering them to share the gospel of forgiveness with the world.

Thomas was not present for all of this activity. He did not believe the other disciples when they told him about their encounter with the risen Christ.

One week later the disciples were gathering again in the house and Thomas was with them. Jesus came and talked with them and engaged Thomas in direct conversation. Thomas responded to Jesus with these words of recognition, "My Lord and my God." This like a more or less normal interaction between Jesus and one of his disciples to you and me, because we have come to refer and think of Christ Jesus as God. Yet these words were electric for the first generations of Christians. 'My Lord and my God.' This was the first time anyone, in any of the Gospels, had ever referred to Jesus as 'my God'. This was the only time anyone, in all of Holy Scripture, referred to Jesus as 'my God'.

Thomas is not the lowest of the disciples. Thomas is not the disciple to be set aside as the example of failure. Thomas is the most perceptive, the most connected with Jesus. Thomas is the example for us of faithfulness. To be faithful is to develop relationships of trust.

Let's take a minute to consider what trust *is not*. Trust is not compliance. Trust is not a characteristic of relationships where authorities exercise their power to control or manipulate others. Thomas' example shows that trust is not blind. Trust is not about accepting someone else's ideas or actions without question or discussion. Trust does not require us to always be agreeable. Trust is not something that resides in an individual.

Trust is a relationship. Trust is a relationship of mutuality, where each individual's ideas and personhood are respected. Trust is built through a series of interactions. Trust is the currency of any human relationship. Trust is the foundation for every healthy relationship. If the other person does not trust you, you don't have much of a relationship. Trust means asking questions. Trust entails digging deeper. Trust requires transparency. Trust doesn't keep some of the information secret, so people don't know the whole story. Trust requires us to know what is most important for the other person.

Trust is a two-way relationship. We see this in the story. The trust that developed was the result of Thomas' actions and Jesus' actions. Everyone who seeks to follow Jesus is called to build relationships of trust. The relationship between Jesus and Thomas is the example for us. Thomas and Jesus had known each other for a while. They built a deeper relationship of trust by asking more questions and by digging deeper.

This is what we are called to do; we are called to build relationships of trust. The first step for us as we seek to be the Body of Christ for the world is to be a place where people build relationships of trust with one another.

The church has not always acted as the Body of Christ for the world. That's because the church has not always been a place where people were primarily concerned with building relationships of trust. Some people in the church have been very suspicious of Thomas. They refer to him as 'doubting Thomas.' It is strange to me that, of all of the disciples, Thomas is the only one who has been given a 'bad name' by many leaders of the church. I wonder if it has something to do with the way Thomas asks difficult questions?

Jesus does not seem threatened by Thomas' questions. Jesus responds to Thomas' questions in ways that built a relationship of trust. Jesus preached a gospel of mutuality, equality and trust. Jesus sought to build relationships of trust with his disciples and all sorts of people. Jesus sought to build relationships of trust, even with the children. He said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them." Jesus was always seeking to build relationships of trust.

We are called to do the same. We are called to build relationships of trust with one another and with all sorts of people, as Jesus did. Relationships of trust will be the foundation for everything we do as followers of Christ Jesus.

One month from today I will begin a time of sabbatical rest. I will be away for just two months, yet I feel the urge to leave you with a few of the ideas that are most important to me about discipleship. I leave you with five lessons I have learned about following Jesus. Each of them is about this beautiful, surprising life to which we are called as followers of Christ Jesus. We learn the first lesson from the story of Thomas. This is the foundation. It is God's call to us to build relationships of trust.