

One of the methods used to arrest and kill Jesus was to whip up false accounts of how Jesus was a bad and dangerous dude who was out to corrupt the people. In Matthew's gospel, the leaders of the synagogue were looking for anything to back up their claim that Jesus was corrupting the people, even "looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" When they confronted Jesus with this accusation, he answers,

"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy." Mt 27

Now, Luke has a different take on things, In his account, Jesus is dangerous to the political powers because he was supposedly going to stage a coup and overthrow the ruling powers of his time.

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.<sup>2</sup> They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.' <sup>3</sup>Then Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' (Luke 23)

In John's gospel, there is no content whatsoever to the accusations made against Jesus—there is only their conviction that Jesus is a criminal.

"Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' <sup>30</sup>They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.'" So, Pilate asks Jesus what he has done. (He is worried that the Jews were going to switch their allegiance from him to Jesus, but Jesus answers that his kingdom is not of this world).

Then Jesus says to Pilate, "I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup>Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

It is no wonder that in this climate of fear, accusation and a rush to judgment that the disciples are shaken and afraid. Was their experience true, or had they been duped? Thomas, especially, wants reassurance that Jesus is really risen. He is not going to take anyone else's word for it. He wants the truth.

We all know what that's like—we want the truth. We want to know what's going on. We want to find the cause of whatever is wrong and fix it. We want to make sure we aren't being duped, either. In today's political climate of fear, accusation, blame, and, yes, even fake news, people are quick to seek support for their own position from whatever source they can get it, even if it has not come from facts.

And recently, a new term has entered our language: "alternative facts". What is true?

Do you blame Thomas? Is he doubting, or is he taking the time to ask the questions he needs to ask before jumping to conclusions? Thomas doesn't want to stop at "maybe". He won't be satisfied until he knows in his own experience that Jesus is alive, and he states exactly what it will take: he has to touch the wounds themselves. Astonishingly, Jesus comes to him to give him exactly what he has asked for. He answers his need for truth by showing up, and inviting him to "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." But Thomas doesn't even touch Jesus. As soon as he hears Jesus' voice, he believes.

What if you were Thomas? What would you need in order to believe? What helps you believe?

A few weeks ago we talked about how Episcopalians and evangelism can be in the same sentence. We don't do soapbox very well. We don't want to be pushy, overbearing, or in your face about our faith. But we've toned it down so much that you'd think we want to keep it all a secret. It's almost like we're ashamed! Has Jesus overlooked us as his disciples? No! He is counting on **us** to spread the news of his love out ***beyond the closed doors of the church.***

Jesus tells Thomas and the rest of the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Each of us here this morning is in the same position as those disciples—in the house with the doors shut. And even though the doors are closed, Jesus has come and is with us. He has come and is saying the same thing to us as he said to those first disciples, "Peace be with you." And every time we gather here, He sends us out into the world to tell the story of his great love for us and for everyone. Jesus loves the people we don't like, those who intimidate us, who disagree with us, and yes, even the people we haven't met yet, and He is asking us to share his love with them *all*.

How will *we* talk about *our* faith? How could *we* start such a conversation? What if we started by being curious about the other person and their experience of the Holy? What more could we learn about God's love from them? Instead of feeling like we have to give them all the answers, we could simply listen to their hunger for God and their experience of finding God and God's grace.

So try this on: ask them who God is for them with a question like this:

"When you think about your spirituality, who is Jesus for you?"

So, When *you* think about your spirituality, who is Jesus for *you*? How do you answer? And remember, Jesus said, blessed are those who believe and yet have not seen.