

EASTER 2 SERMON for April 16, 2023
TEXT: John 20:19-31 (Doubting Thomas)
TITLE: “Nothing is impossible for God”

I just finished reading an excellent book published in 2022 that I got from the public library. The book is called *Confidence Man: The Making of Donald Trump and the Breaking of America*. It was written by Maggie Haberman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the New York Times. She knows as much about Trump as anybody, and has interviewed him and written about him many times since he began as a real-estate developer in New York city.

It's mind-blowing how Trump would say one thing to one interviewer and the next day say the opposite to another interviewer, depending on what Trump thought they wanted to hear! Yet he often complained about “fake news”. Although he didn't invent that phrase, he certainly popularized it across the U.S. Any news he didn't want to hear, he called “fake news”!

We live in an age of skepticism, when people tend to disbelieve anything that hasn't been scientifically proven, but lately there are more and more people refusing to believe what *has* been scientifically proven (regarding Covid-19 for instance, and how to treat it). I suspect that these people are so isolated, or have been lied to so often by people they trusted, that they tend to disbelieve anything *anybody* says!

The disciple Thomas thought he was being lied to by the other disciples of Jesus, who reported to him in verse 25: “We have seen the Lord”, so he got stuck with the name “Doubting

Thomas". Thomas hadn't seen Jesus alive right after the resurrection, as the other disciples had. Yet Thomas did not dismiss what they said, as "fake news". He was at least open to actual proof, because he said, to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in that same house, and Thomas was with them. And, although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them, again, and said to them: "Peace be with you" (his usual greeting). Then Jesus turned to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe."

Thomas was shocked, exclaiming: "My *Lord* and my *God!*" This wasn't OMG, as people say nowadays. It was an admission and a confession that this person in front of him really was the Lord, and really was God.

Note that Thomas did not say, "Wow, Jesus, how did you come back from the dead! That's quite a trick!" No, he realized that this great miracle of Jesus' actual *re-creation* was a proof that Jesus had been the manifestation of God in the flesh. Who else could possibly go back and forth like this, from body to spirit and back to body again?

This is the greatest miracle in history, greater than the raising of Lazarus. I don't think it's fake news. I believe it's true, because I believe in miracles – even one as supernatural as this.

I suspect that there aren't many other people in our day who believe in the supernatural. But there are some. I've talked to people who said they spoke with dead relatives; or seen visions of Jesus; and even some who have been healed by a spirit who visited them, who they believed was Jesus, or an angel.

With this in mind, I brought *another* book with me today, which is also available at the public library (this happens to be my own copy). It's called *Opening Heaven's Door*, subtitled, *What the Dying May Be Trying to Tell Us About Where They're Going*. This book, published in 2014, is also by award-winning journalist: Patricia Pearson. She carefully interviewed a whole variety of people who told her about their mystical experiences, and in an unbiased way, she tries to make sense of them.

The people I personally have spoken to about their supernatural experiences were perfectly sane, but had never told anyone their story for fear they would be looked upon as wackos. But they thought that I, as a clergyperson who "works for God", would understand and accept their experiences were genuine. And I did.

God's power has been at work in the world ever since creation. Some of us, in our time on earth, have seen God's power in the healing of illnesses, and even in deliverances from death when doctors said that death was imminent.

And then, of course, we've all seen God's power in *everyday* miracles, such as electricity, telecommunications, medicines, vaccines, and so on.

We have gotten so accustomed to all these evidences of God's amazing power that we have come to take these miracles for granted, as if they are perfectly natural. And I believe that our modern ability to *manipulate* God's power, by machines and chemicals and genetic tinkering, has made us rather arrogant.

And I think that most people have been fooled into thinking that we *humans* are the powerful ones, whereas most people at Jesus' time feared the powers and forces of nature (that is, they were in awe and stunned amazement). They were more gullible than we are today, felt controlled by evil spirits and good spirits, and the powers and gods that ruled that they believed they were subject to.

But Thomas was different. He was very modern in his skepticism. Seeing was believing. This "doubting Thomas" only became "believing Thomas" once he saw Jesus with his own eyes. But notice that Jesus doesn't give Thomas much credit for his new awareness and his new faith. Jesus says: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blest are those who have not seen me and still have come to believe!"

This was certainly a special visit from Jesus, and a great blessing to Thomas. But even with this proof, Thomas' declaration was still an act of faith.

This is the faith that every Christian should have, the faith that nothing is impossible for God. This was the faith of many Biblical characters. To take one example, there was the prophet Jeremiah, who heard God speaking to him saying, "See, I am the

LORD (Yahweh), the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?"

Nothing is too difficult for our omnipotent God: not His incarnation in the womb of a humble Virgin; not his living of a sinless life as a human being, which he couldn't have done without being God. Nothing is too hard for God, even resurrecting his Christ on Easter Morning, even resurrecting you and me at the end of this world's history, on what we call the "Last Day".

Let me close with an example of a man who trusted in the power of God, a German pastor named Werner Koch, who in the 1930s was part of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's underground seminary at Finkenwalde. Koch became a grandfather of the peace movement in Europe. I want to quote a couple of paragraphs of what he said about his two years in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp during World War II:

"In the concentration camp, we found every morning five, six, seven, or eight comrades hanging in the electrical barbed wire, because during the night they had come out of the barracks full of despair and put an end to their lives. I confess that I also had many moments of despair, because every morning you woke up, you didn't know if you would be alive in the evening. We had to bear witness to many cruelties and assassinations during the day. We were physically so strained and helpless, that danger of resignation was very close at times.

"But there was a voice we couldn't forget. The voice said, 'Don't be anxious; I have driven the evil out. I am the way, and the resurrection.' And so we said to each other that we are on the

side of victory. It is not the wicked, not the evil, who have the last word. So we received from day to day the courage to go on.”

My friends, let us remember: Christ is still with us.

And let us continue to live by faith. Let us trust that no matter what happens, God will bring us through, and will make everything all right in the end.

Amen.

Prayer of the Church Easter 2A April 16, 2023

We pray for ourselves, our neighbours, and our world, saying: "O God, in Your mercy.... and respond: **Hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, we thank You that through the waters of Baptism You called us to be Your children. You washed away our sin, and joined us to Your Son's holy body, the church. Help us to live in faith that we are safe and secure, and that nothing can separate us from Your infinite love.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

O Holy Spirit, our Mother, we thank You for the international family called the church of Jesus Christ, for the faith we have learned from it and the support we have received from it. We pray for the health of our church in these troubled times. Continue to give us strength to serve and help one another, as we have been served and helped.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, we thank You for exemplifying true love and compassion during Your short life on this earth. Help us to rejoice in our eternal salvation, and to trust You to carry us through this life, in spite of our doubts and fears. And give us a spirit of constant thanksgiving, for all the blessings You continue to shower upon us.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

O God our Creator and Preserver, give us the strength to bear our own burdens and to help others to bear their burdens. Give us compassion and empathy, so that we are able to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

Dear God, we pray for those who are suffering from the wars going on around the world, in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria. We pray especially for

the people of the Ukraine and their president, Volodymir Zelensky. Comfort those who grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, and help them to hear and believe the good news of the resurrection.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

Dear God, we pray for those who are ill in body or mind, and for family members and all who are trying to take care of them, especially those whose help is unappreciated or under-appreciated. We pray also for those we name now, aloud, or in the silence of our hearts.

Heal us all in body and soul, so that we may live full and useful lives that glorify You, and may finally enter the reward of eternal bliss You have prepared for those who love You.

O God in Your mercy ... **Hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray for this congregation, and each person here today, that we all may grow in faith, hope, and love; and that You, O God, would bring us and all believers to the joy of perfect union with You and with one another in heaven, and be united with all who have gone before us, so that together we may behold the face of our Risen Saviour, Jesus the Christ. **AMEN.**