

“Though You Doubt, Yet Still Believe”

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house where the disciples had met
were locked for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.

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.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

But 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 the house,
and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were shut,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas,
“Put your finger here and see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed
because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have come to believe.”

Now Jesus did many other signs
in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Though You Doubt, Yet Still Believe

John 20:19-31

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I.

For those who have been around awhile, you know that I get a little squirrely in my sermon writing the Sunday prior to a vacation week. Which isn't necessarily a *bad* thing, but it is a *thing*. So while it is true the homiletical brush strokes may become less broad on these occasions, there is still much fruit and great truth to be found in the exploration of even the smallest of details of life. Given this, today I would like to tell you a story about one particular drawer over in the kitchen at the manse.

When we first moved into the manse we were overwhelmed by the sheer size of our new house. Which was not hard to do, nor was it necessarily surprising. Prior to our arrival in Canton, Linda and Nicole had been living in an apartment over a one car garage, and I was living in a 3/4 ton Chevy van with the middle and rear seats removed and a twin bed in the back.

II.

You well can imagine, then, that moving into a 5 bedroom house, complete with living room, family room, dining room, office and kitchen was quite the change of venue. Though we scarcely had enough furniture to furnish one room, with a few remaining pieces widely spaced in a second, with its charming wood floors, oak trim, high ceilings, long windows and delightful pocket doors the manse was a wonderful building in which to begin a family and raise our children.

Except for the kitchen. The kitchen was *brutal*. Small, dated, no dishwasher, old scarred linoleum on the floor, drop ceiling with poor lighting and, worst of all, it was *pink*. I mean, pink from top to bottom; all the cabinets, every wall. It taxes the mind to imagine such a time in the history of the world when a pink kitchen was all the rage. Probably a half year window in the early 70s.



III.

In all honesty, though, we were nothing but grateful for the job, the opportunity to start a life together, and to live in a house which quickly became a home. For many churches, owning a manse (a term synonymous with parsonage and particular to Presbyterians) is both a blessing and a curse. It is quick and easy lodging for the pastor and his or her family, but it is also the place which gets the short end of the budgetary stick.



Over those first few years we made great efforts to welcome the congregation into the manse at every opportunity; many of whom had not even been inside of for decades. Some people knew the score, however, Dale Grant in particular. Dale worked tirelessly to get the manse ready for our arrival and continued to make improvements for a great many of those first few years; especially, replacing all the windows, which was a *huge* upgrade.



IV.

While all these changes were greatly appreciated, the better things become in other areas of the manse the worse the kitchen looked by comparison. It stuck out like a pink thumb. Years went by; 15 years to be exact. At some point, certain women of the church, and I can't remember exactly who, decided that Linda deserved a better kitchen. Or if not better, than at least not pink. Conversations were had, dreaming and scheming took place, and eventually, in 2013, a plan was hatched to remodel the kitchen, open it up to the dining room, and reconfiguring the pantry which had been painted a mustard color (what better compliment to the pink?).

V.

In late spring, a dedicated bunch of men from the church began the demolition work. The pantry and kitchen was taken down to stud walls and subfloor. The wall between the dining room and kitchen was removed and a huge header installed. New wiring, plumbing and windows were installed; sheetrock hung, mudded, and painted. The space was completely and utterly transformed in just a few short months. All the while this was happening, our own Barry Walch was busy making custom cherry cabinets, upper and lower, over in his shop on Judson Street which he then installed. They are nothing short of gorgeous.

It was an amazing undertaking and, frankly, a miracle which few, if any, saw coming. Beyond the workers, the entire congregation got behind the endeavor and helped secure the funds to pay for it. Needless to say, it was a big moment in the life of our family, but also for our church. Over the last decade we have enjoyed many wonderful meals, conversations, and opportunities for fellowship. Suffice to say, the manse kitchen remodel was a game changer. (See photos below). And, no, we don't miss the pink. Not one bit.

VI.

I have regaled you with this story for two very good reasons. First, so everyone has an understanding and an awareness of our own history as a congregation. About how this current moment rests upon all the others which came before it, just as future moments will be largely decided by what *you* choose to do and how *you* choose to act, now, in these present moments we are currently experiencing. It is important to realize there has been, and will continue to be, a story arc to this place and its people which each of you have inherited and for which you are, now, responsible.

Second, I have told you all this to help you contextualize the rest of the story of this one particular drawer over in the kitchen at the manse. Specifically, the very large middle drawer located under the island which is used to store mixing bowls, measuring cups, loaf pans, hand mixer, juicer, sifter, mandolin and colanders. Simply stated, the drawer will not stay closed.

VII.

Near as Linda and I can recollect for at least the past two years (through probably closer to three) that drawer would slowly creep open. At first it was every few days or so, then it became everyday, then several times a day, and now it is to the point were that drawer creeps open every single time you close it. As such, this drawer and our experience of it, is an amazing exemplar of what one will get used to, abide, and become accustomed.

I will secretly confess that for a great many months I simply assumed that the drawer was creeping open because Linda was overloading it and the sheer weight of what was in the drawer was slowly working it open. Being the good and helpful husband, however, I decided to follow my best advice to every groom I marry and simply kept my mouth shut.

VIII.

Then, a couple of weeks ago we had a “Come to Jesus Moment” about the drawer and decided to take action. We emptied everything from the drawer, closed it, only to discover this made it worse; the drawer crept open even faster, seemingly of it’s own volition (with a nod to gravity, I’m sure). Apparently it was *not* Linda’s fault as I had assumed. So glad I didn’t say anything about it to her.

Standing there reflecting on the situation, I decided it must simply be a matter of removing the drawer and adjusting the slides. Only problem was, when I went to do so I could not figure out how to disconnect the drawer from the slides. I made a mental note to ask Barry, as he is the one who installed them; that, and Barry pretty much knows everything about anything anyway. Only problem was, I kept forgetting to ask him about it and have him stop over. So, my roundabout solution to the quandary is to write a sermon about it. (Barry, I hope word reaches you.)

IX.

Today’s scripture reading from John 20 is the very familiar story of “Doubting Thomas.” While he was certainly no Judas, today’s passage nevertheless paints Thomas with a brush of infamy and serves to demote him far below the likes of Peter the Rock upon which the Church would be built (his denials not withstanding), John the beloved Disciple and, later, the

Apostle Paul who would bring the Gospel message to all the world. I know I'm going back a ways for this analogy, but in the "Welcome Back Cotter homeroom class of "Sweathogs" that was Jesus' disciples, Thomas might be rightly understood as the Arnold Horseshack of the group; always a day late and seemingly forever slightly behind the curve, but forgiven if only for the honesty of his pure intentions. Whereas we might rightly admire Peter, John and Paul for their piety, it is Thomas to whom we can best relate. After all, who among us does not harbor doubts when it comes to our faith?

X.

Now, the relationship between doubt and faith is an intriguing one; and something we would do well to explore. One time, 30 years ago, I preached a sermon in one of my first churches in which I expressed some degree of doubt about my faith. For a few in the congregation there that day it went over like a lead balloon. I remember a few of them, afterward, sitting me down and admonishing the young pastor in his first call, to never, *ever* let on that I had doubts; as if the whole house of cards would come crashing down if I did so again. After all, they said, I was the *pastor*. What would become of the sheep if the pastor wavered in the least?

What helped sustained me through that experience was remembering another occasion while I was still in seminary. I was sitting on a bench talking to a classmate about the subject of doubt. She said something which I have never forgotten, she said, "I'm on the believing side of doubt."

XI.

I suppose there is some small chance that a few among you in the pews, streaming this morning's service, or reading this sermon from the email might, once again, feel the urge to sit me down and give me a good talking to for what I'm about to say: the salt of one's faith will forever be peppered with doubt. Not only is this appropriate and to be expected, I would go so far as to argue that it is *doubt* which helps to form the foundation of our faith. While doubt is a *thing*, it isn't necessarily a *bad* thing.

The real question which we must ask, is what is the ilk and degree of doubt with which we are willing live, and for how long? Is it a brutally ugly, pink kitchen of doubt which overshadows everything else around you? Or is it the

mere inconvenience of one solitary drawer which has the tendency to slip open now and then in an otherwise beautiful kitchen and comfortable home?

XII.

Now, before you start shouting out your answers to me, recognize that the amount of pepper which seasons the salt our faith changes over time. Each one has a faith that is a story arc composed of the people we have known, the experiences we have had, and the tribulations we have endured. For many of us, we inherited this faith from our parents, grandparents or friends; it rests up everything which came before this moment. Now, though, *we* are responsible for our *own* faith story and by what *we* choose to do and how *we* choose to act, now, in these present moments we are currently experiencing. Just because you begin with a brutally ugly pink kitchen of doubt, there is nothing to say it must stay that way.

XIII.

I think if there is a lesson that Doubting Thomas has to teach us, it is this: be *honest* with your doubts. Have the courage to bring them to God and voice them in the presence of others. My guess is, Thomas wasn't the only one in the room that night who had doubts; its just that he, alone, was brave enough to acknowledge them.

And be patient. You are not alone in writing the story of your faith. Others will arrive to help you, and bolster your cause, and lend a hand, and offer a listening ear, and a soft shoulder upon which to lean, and strong hands to guide. Such that though you doubt, yet still you shall come to believe. Amen.











