

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday 26 October, 2025 – Last Sunday after Trinity
Doubt and Faith
Readings – Hebrews 4:12-16 & Matthew 28:16-20

Today's 2nd reading is the only recorded encounter between the risen Jesus and his disciples in Matthew's gospel. When the disciples encounter Jesus, risen and alive, on a mountain in Galilee, Matthew tells us that some of them worshipped Jesus. But not all of them. Some of them "doubted."

Many commentators clarify that the word – "doubt," in our story today is better translated as, to waver, to hesitate, to vacillate, to pause. They explain that this word shows up one other time in the New Testament also in Matthew. Jesus is walking on the water and calls out Peter to join him. Peter steps out of the boat. But then Peter sees the wind and the waves, becomes frightened and begins to sink. Jesus catches Peter and says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Meaning, why did you waver? Why did you hesitate?

The disciples' feeling on that mountain is very similar. The risen Jesus, the Jesus who once was dead and buried in his tomb, is standing right in front of them! Their eyes are telling them one thing. But the logic in their brain is telling them something very different like, "This is impossible!" Some of the disciples immediately respond with worship and adoration. But others simply freeze up in shock and they waver.

We all have doubts... and many of us have had our doubts about faith and about God. When do doubts arise? Let's consider just 2 instances when doubts may come. Sometimes we read a passage in the Bible, and it seems too impossible to be true. Some passages have us asking – how can this be true? Examples from the Old Testament are too many. To give a couple from the New Testament – I do wonder where the 12 and 7 empty baskets surfaced from during the feeding of the crowd in deserted places? Joseph is a character that has always puzzled me. Did he have a mum? How did he explain to her his decision to take pregnant Mary as his wife?

Challenging phases of life allow doubts to creep into our minds and we ask where God is during difficult times. Queen Elizabeth recorded 1992 as her "Annus Horribilis". She stated, "1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure." 2002 is one of my "Annus Horribilis". My brother, his wife and their only child died in a vehicle accident. We buried 3 people in one day which was too much for my mum. She died 5 months later. Still struggling, I learned that my son has dropped out of university and he's father to a one-year-old child whose mother is married to another man! It doesn't just rain, it pours!

Doubt is not unbelief, it's struggling to believe. The Bible is full of stories of doubting people. The "heroes" of the Bible did not earn their title because they believed without doubt. Rather they earned their title because they had faith with doubt. One thing the Bible and history teach us, is that many people, have struggled with issues of doubt and faith - Adam, Sarah, Jacob, Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Jonah, Martha, Peter... people who question, falter, doubt and yet in the end remained faithful.

John the Baptist doubted whether Jesus was legit. The disciples doubted Jesus when he said he would rise from the dead that one of them earned a nickname for his doubts - Doubting Thomas.

Jesus has risen from the grave he's about to go to heaven. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. The author could have excluded that part – those 3 words. Unless the author was trying to do something different. Trying to show us that doubt is normal. Our struggle is summed up in the story of the father with a sick son, who says to Jesus, do something if you can, and Jesus says "everything is possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief." **(Mark 9:23-24)**

It is the nature of life that there are things we cannot know. We doubt because we don't have all the facts. And there will always be things we do not know. We could spend our days consumed with the issues of why - issues of the unknown. And yet there are so many things we do know that we need to carry on doing. An example of this is seen in the disciples worshipping Jesus. They doubted but they were still there worshipping. They didn't understand it, they couldn't comprehend it, but he was there before their eyes and so they worshiped.

A wise man once said, "Don't forget in the darkness what you learned in the light." In times of struggle, in times of a faltering faith, we must carry on, holding on to what we know, and we'll come out the other side with renewed faith, renewed hope, renewed zeal. We pray for God to help us with our doubts, to accept the things we cannot know whilst continuing doing what we do know.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus,
the storm is life,
and life is the storm,
and there is no escaping it;
but what matters is that you are in the storm with us,
a beacon and a presence that is sure. Amen

Dolapo Ogunbawo