



March 30, 2008

Focus scripture
John 20:19–31

Additional scriptures

Acts 2:14a, 22–32

Psalms 16

1 Peter 1:3–9

Spirit of peace,
move among us.
Breathe trust that
relies on your pres-
ence when we see
and when we don't
see. Breathe hon-
esty that acknowl-
edges our doubts
and questions.
Breathe hope and
forgiveness for the
sake of community
with you and oth-
ers. Amen.

Faithful Doubt

Christ greets fearful disciples with the word of peace and the gift of Spirit. Easter joy results. Even Thomas' doubt becomes faith's stepping-stone rather than stumbling block. What kind of faith does God seek? God seeks trust that witnesses to a living hope; joy that celebrates God, who opens paths that lead to life.

Focus Scripture: John 20:19–31

The opening verse connects locked doors with "fear of the Jews." Yet the disciples were all Jews. The reference here more properly focuses on the Jewish religious authorities who opposed Jesus and sought his execution (19:6). The absence of Thomas from this gathering is not explained, nor is it condemned. After all, the disciples who gathered did so out of fear, not faith. In Acts 2, the gift of God's Spirit comes during the Pentecost festival, fifty days after the first Easter. In John, the gift of Spirit comes on the evening of the first Easter. Jesus bestows Spirit upon the community for the exercise of forgiveness. Jesus' "breathing" upon the disciples to empower them with Spirit recalls Genesis 2:7, where God breathes life into the one formed of dust. The same word in Greek means "breath" and "spirit."

"Seeing and believing" dominate the encounter between Thomas and Jesus. This has been an ongoing theme in John. At the opening of this gospel, Jesus asks Nathaniel, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree?" (1:50). The story of the man born blind in John 9 is filled with nuances about sight and belief. In this focus passage, the only blessing spoken by Jesus and recorded in John falls on those who have not seen, but believe. That blessing reflects the life situation of the original community addressed by this gospel. Most, if not all, of John's first readers would not have seen Jesus. Yet they believed. Jesus' blessing of them is Jesus' blessing of us as well.

This story is often used to berate doubt, based on verse 27. But the word translated as "doubt" there

is not one of the common Greek words for doubt. It is *apistos*, whose literal meaning would be closer to "without faith" or "unbelief." Jesus graciously provides Thomas what he needs to move from unbelief to belief. Faith does not remove all doubts and questions. Faith invites trust of and witness to the risen Christ. With Thomas' confession, this chapter concludes with a statement of faith.

The additional scriptures call readers to witness to such faith and trust. Peter's Pentecost sermon (**Acts 2:14a, 22–32**) points not just to himself, but to "all of us" who are witnesses to the risen Christ. **Psalm 16** anchors a prayer for deliverance in witness to the God who shows us the path of life. **1 Peter 1:3–9** testifies to subsequent generations of faith: "although you have not seen [Jesus], you love him...even though you do not see [Jesus] now, you believe in him."

The hope brought by God also is a strong image in the other passages. The psalmist, in **Psalm 16**, sings the hope that God does "not give me up." The writer of **1 Peter 1:3–9** speaks of God giving "us a new birth into a living hope."



Jesus meets us, even in times of unbelief, and provides what is needed for faith and renewed zeal for witnessing through Spirit's gift and hope's invitation. When have you experienced God breathing fresh hope and new life into you? In what ways might times of unbelief become places of growth in your faith and in your life as a witness? Where do you find the encouragement to trust and have faith in Jesus, the risen Christ whom you have not seen?

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