

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

April 12, 2015

“You Are Allowed To Doubt”



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Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

1 John 1:1-4

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

John 20:24-29

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.’

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“You Are Allowed to Doubt”

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Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Billy Graham wanted to mail a letter, so he asked a young boy where the post office was.

After the boy had given him directions, Billy Graham thanked him and said, “If you’ll come to the church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to Heaven.” The boy said, “I don’t think I’ll be there, you don’t even know how to get to the post office.” That young boy doubted Billy Graham.

You are allowed to doubt. That’s what I want to talk with you about today. You are allowed to doubt. Whether you are a preacher or a parishioner. You are allowed to doubt. Whether you are an adult or a child. You are allowed to doubt. Whether you are from a small town or a big city. You are allowed to doubt. (Say to those around you: You are allowed to doubt. You are allowed to doubt. You are allowed to doubt.)

Thomas the disciple was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them after he was resurrected. The other disciples told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord.” But Thomas said, “Unless I see him for myself, and put my hands in his wounds, I will not believe.” A week later Thomas was with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” And Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your hands in my wounds.” Then Jesus added, “Do not doubt, but believe.” Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to Thomas, “Do you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen me, but believe anyway.” This story is, of course, where Thomas gets his nickname: Doubting Thomas.

Doubting Thomas gets a bad rap and a bad rep for doubting. Who among us can blame him for doubting that an apparent human being was raised physically from the dead? Who among us can blame him for wanting to see Jesus for himself? Who among us can blame him for wanting to feel Jesus’ wounds for himself? Certainly not the other disciples. Remember when the disciples heard that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had been raised from the dead? Did they immediately believe? Did they

take it on faith? Did they praise God without any proof? Heck no. They ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Sure they were excited to see for themselves that Jesus had risen from the dead. But they were all doubting Thomas's. They wouldn't take it on faith that Jesus was raised from the dead. They had to see for themselves. But we don't call them Doubting Peter and Doubting John. We only call one disciple Doubting Thomas.

In seminary class one day a professor asked us, "Where is the body of Christ?" She said, "If Jesus was physically raised from the dead, then his body's got to be out there someplace. So where is it? Where is the body of Christ?" My classmates tried to answer her question. But nobody's answer seemed to be the right one. So I said, "Well, the Bible says: The church is the body of Christ. So we are the body of Christ. So the body of Christ is right here." She kind of rolled her eyes and said, "Yes, Mr. Freeman. But Christians believe," (I think she was implying that I'm not really a Christian) "that Jesus was physically raised from the dead. So his body has to be out there someplace. So where is it?" She never did get a satisfactory answer from any of us students. Maybe what she was trying to do was to introduce us to the possibility that Jesus wasn't physically raised from the dead, but that Jesus was spiritually raised from the dead. What do you think? And remember: you are allowed to doubt, because this is a United Church of Christ church.

The United Church of Christ does not make it a crime to doubt. In the UCC, you are allowed to think. In the UCC, you are allowed to ponder. In the UCC, you are allowed to doubt. That's one of the reasons why I became a UCC minister. The UCC does not require you to check your brain at the church door. The UCC does not require you to believe in the Sunday School theology you were taught as a kid. The UCC does not require you to ignore all the religious scholarship that has happened over the last few hundred years. You can come to your own conclusions

about religious questions. That's the nice thing about Free Will. You are allowed to doubt. But also: You are allowed to believe. A lot of times, people are allowed to believe. But they are not allowed to doubt.

Osama bin Laden's followers flew planes into the World Trade Center without a doubt. Jim Jones' followers drank the Kool-Aid without a doubt. Charles Manson's followers murdered people without a doubt. You see? It's reasonable to doubt. It's healthy to doubt. It's sane to doubt. Jesus doesn't expect his followers to be mindless robots. Jesus doesn't expect his followers to be zombies. Jesus doesn't expect his followers to be sheeple. (If he did, that would be baaaaad.) Thomas wasn't wrong for doubting. He was normal for doubting. You are normal for doubting. That's why I have a talkback after my sermons, so you can question what I have to say, so you can disagree with what I have to say, so you can doubt what I have to say. You are allowed to doubt what I have to say. You are allowed to doubt what other people have to say. You are even allowed to doubt what the Bible has to say.

The Bible says God created the earth in just six days. If you believe that, that's okay. But if you don't believe that, that's okay, too. Just like Thomas, you are allowed to doubt. The Bible says God formed Eve out of Adam's rib. If you believe that, that's okay. But if you don't believe that, that's okay, too. Just like Thomas, you are allowed to doubt. The Bible says Jonah lived in "a large fish" for three days. If you believe that, that's okay. But if you don't believe that, that's okay, too. Just like Thomas, you are allowed to doubt. But you are also allowed to believe. Whether you doubt or believe, you're still considered to be a good Christian. Just like Doubting Thomas.

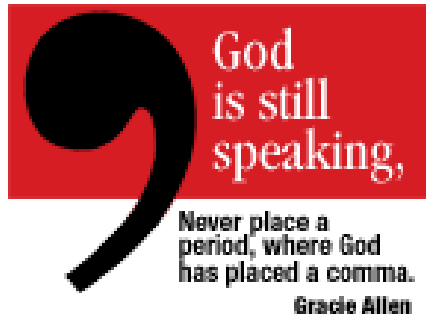
I have a friend who is not a Christian. My friend is an atheist. My friend doesn't believe in God or spirits or an afterlife. My

friend is a widower, his wife died several years ago. One day, shortly after his wife died, he walked into his living room, and there she was, sitting on the couch. And then she was gone. My friend believes it was his eyes playing tricks on him or his brain playing tricks on him. He doubts that it was his wife sitting there or that it was his wife's spirit sitting there. He doubts. He is allowed to doubt. And you are allowed to doubt. But you are also allowed to believe that that was his wife's spirit sitting there.. Just like you are allowed to believe that the disciples saw the spiritual body of Jesus or the physical body of Jesus.

Now, if you want to believe in a resurrected body of Christ, that's fine. And if you want people to see the resurrected body of Christ, here's an idea: Be the resurrected body of Christ. The Bible says, "In God we live and move and have our being." So live and move and have your being in God by being the resurrected body of Christ. By believing in Jesus and following his teachings. Bring food to our Food Pantry. Bring clothing to our Clothing Closet. Invite a stranger to come to our church. And support our housing of the homeless. And maybe people will stop being Doubting Thomas's, and believe in the body of Christ, because they see the body of Christ in you.

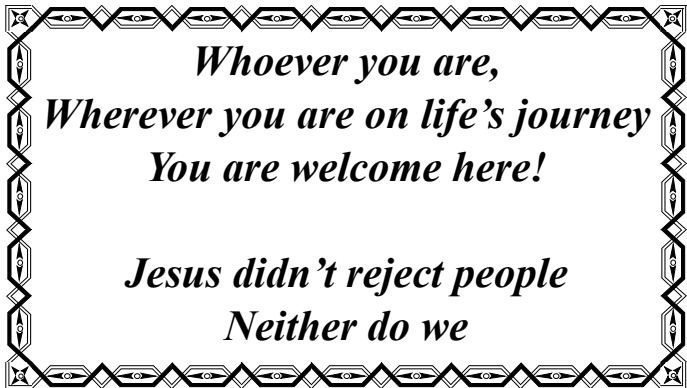
Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to believe in Jesus.
Help us to follow Jesus.
And help us to be Jesus to everyone we meet.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*



Never place a
period, where God
has placed a comma.

Gracie Allen



THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*
Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*
Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*
Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*
Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*
Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*
Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*
Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*
Humanism