

“From Doubt to Trust”

John 20:19-31 & Matthew 14:25-32

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Lord Jesus, we want to be people who perceive you, savor your love and grow in you, to be among those in whom the power of your hope is at work and who confess you in word and deed. Awaken us, Lord. You speak your powerful word always anew throughout the ages. Give us ears to hear! Amen.

I went from doubt to trust of bale twine. We had an abundance of used bale twine on the farm. On average, we used two bales of hay and five bales of straw per day which resulted in fourteen loops of twine per day, over five thousand loops per year. My dad always carried a jackknife, pliers, and several loops of twine in his pockets. Initially, I was doubtful of the usefulness of twine. However over the years, I experienced that twine is the answer for almost any farm need. My Dad used twine to fix things like Red Green and MacGyver used duct tape. My dad used twine to wipe up spills and clear debris. Forgot your gloves, then coil twine around your hands for protection. Wounded, away from the first aid kit, then twine will serve as a bandage for bleeding, sling for an injury or add something stiff for a split. Broken gate, twine to the rescue. Need a strong rope. After years of hair braiding with my sisters my dad could quickly braid a rope. Need a ladder, then make a twine ladder, attach the jackknife to one end and toss it over wherever you wanted to go and pull up the ladder. The answer to all fencing issues was twine, whether a splice of the wire, lashing of a broken post, wrapping the post for insulation, or adjusting the electric wire. In the field, each of our tractors had additional twine. In a pinch twine was used to cobble implements together until they could be fixed. Leaking hose or pipe, then wrap it tightly with, you guessed it, twine. I could go on and on. Therefore, my experiences of my dad's twine resourceful moved me from doubt of twine's effectiveness to trust that twine can fix it.

There are over a thousand “therefores” in the Bible. In Dorothy Bass' book *Practicing our Faith*, she explains the importance of the “therefore” factor. The “therefore” is seeking experiences of God and letting them transform you to resurrection. In less churchy words, seeking experiences of love, joy, peace, and grace and letting them move you to abundant life, extravagant love, and exuberant joy. The “therefore” involves being honest about our doubts, naming our struggles, identifying our brokenness, wrestling with our skepticisms and in the midst of all of that practicing our faith, hospitality, forgiveness, generosity, love in action. Practicing is the “therefore” that moves us, transforms us, invigorates us. Alan Richardson wrote: “We know truth about God only by doing it, not by talking or reasoning about it, just as we know love only by loving. Truth in the Biblical sense is something to be practiced.” Jesus is the truth. The truth is Jesus rose from the dead. The truth is God is resurrecting the cosmos.

My experience is when I exercise regularly, I sleep well, eat healthier, have great energy, am compassionate, gracious, and joyful. I have let a series of health issues and other challenges limit my exercise, sending me in a downward spiral. Today, I am overweight, lethargic, and gloomy. My experience has taught me the “therefore.” It will be challenging at first: therefore, I need to have a plan to motivate my exercise; therefore, I need to tell others to hold me accountable; therefore, I need to exercise until my health returns; therefore, I am on a journey to health. This journey will be different because I am a different person, in a different world, with different circumstances; and yet, I know aspects of the journey because I have experienced similar journeys to health in my past. I know I will be healthy again, because I know the “therefore” of practicing exercise.

There are at least three major “therefore” moments in today’s scripture, movements from doubt to trust. The first is for the disciples. **John 20:19-23 “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, the resurrected Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After Jesus 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 God has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, Jesus breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”**

Often it is not enough to intellectually know something. The disciples told Thomas about the risen Jesus. Therefore movements, from doubt to trust, often involve experiences. **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 Thomas, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But Thomas 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 Jesus’ 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 Jesus 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 Jesus, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’”**

The third “therefore” moment is for you. John gives the purpose for writing the gospel. **John 20:30-31 “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 Child of God, and that through believing you may have life in Jesus’ name.”** John tells of Jesus’ teachings, healings, life in hopes of you experiencing God, in hopes of these accounts resonating with your experiences, in hopes of giving you therefore moments, movement from doubt to trust. The “therefore” resurrections are way beyond our comprehension, they are unique for each of us, they are glorious beyond our grandest dreams therefore John does not try to explain any of this, John leaves it open, infinite, eternal. I share these experiences, so you may believe.

Richard Lischer explains the resurrection cannot be explained—just practiced—and performed: not in a seminar or even a sermon but in people worshipping together, praying and then rolling up their sleeves and practicing resurrection in their families, communities, institutions, by loving, serving, giving and living, in hope, not only for personal resurrection but for the ultimate victory of truth, goodness, grace and love in our lives and in our world.

E. B. White wrote a vignette on resurrection about his wife who died a few years earlier. She loved to garden: every year planned carefully, ordered from seed catalogues, created a new diagram for each year’s planting. After she became ill, she continued and managed somehow to get herself outside when it was time to plant. “Armed with a diagram and clipboard, Catherine would get into a shabby old raincoat, much too long for her, and put on a little round wool hat and proceed to the director’s chair placed at the edge of the plot of soil. There she would sit, hour after hour, with the wind and the weather, while Henry Allen produced dozens of paper packages of new bulbs and a basket full of old ones, ready for the intricate interment. There was something comical, yet touching in her bedraggled appearance on this awesome occasion. The small, hunched-over figure: her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be another spring: oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand; sitting there with her chart under those dark skies in the dying October calmly plotting the resurrection.” O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God, who gives us resurrections through Jesus.

William Sloane Coffin wrote: "I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap, and then you grow wings. What is faith? Faith is being grasped by the power of love. Faith is recognizing God is infinite mercy, love unending."

Faith looks for experiences to push through doubts. Doubt can be an invitation to movement to resurrection. How does this account of Peter struggling to follow, being overcome with doubt, and then being rescued by Jesus apply to your life? **Matthew 14:25-32 "About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," Jesus said. "Take courage. I am here!" Then Peter called to Jesus, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when Peter saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed Peter. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?" When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped."**

Circumstances scream at us to be fearful. God provides peace. Voices tell us, stay in the boat, do nothing, look the other way, play it safe. God invites us to do what seems impossible. Life breaks us down. God builds us up. Life fragments us. God makes us whole. We fail often. God grabs us, helps us resume our footing and invites us to try again. God provides us experiences to journey through our doubts to abundant life.

The 23rd Psalm is a song of confident trust in God. Have you pondered the doubts that the psalmist answers through the prayer? Lost, unsure what to do, agonizing over which choice to make; therefore; "The Lord is your shepherd." Struggling financially, losing health; therefore; "You will not need a thing." Exhausted, unable to sleep, burned out, overworked; therefore; "God makes you lie down in green pastures." Thirsty, being swept away by floods; therefore; "God leads you beside still waters." Broken, distraught, grieving, hurting; therefore; "God restores your soul." Uncertain how to vote, longing for equality, desperate for peace; therefore; "God leads you in right paths for God's name's sake." Tragedy, chaos, crisis, disaster, depression, fear, hate, anger, worry, anxiety, stress; therefore; "Even though you walk through the darkest valley, you fear no evil; for God is always with you; God's rod and God's staff they comfort you." Hungry; therefore; "God prepares a table for you." Shamed, shunned, embarrassed, attacked; therefore; God prepares a table, (a symbol of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace) "in the presence of your enemies." Sad, empty; therefore; "God anoints your head with oil; your cup overflows" a symbol of joy, blessing and shalom. Lost in negative thoughts, unable to forgive; therefore; "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life." Lonely, homeless, seeking belonging; therefore; "You shall dwell in the house of the Lord your whole life long." Every phrase of the 23rd Psalm reveals hope, faith, belief, trust, confident expectancy based on the promises of God, that likely resulted from experiences of God that overcame lived doubts.

Therefore, my beloved. Amen