

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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April 24, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God, Our Creator, and our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ! Now I know this week, we all have been continuing to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus as we move deeper into this Easter season but we actually had a holiday pass just a few days ago. As many of you know this past Friday was Earth Day! So as we consider this lesson from the Gospel of John about faith and doubt with Thomas, I want to start off with a little story I was told once that can bring us wisdom from, I would guess, an unexpected place.

The story goes a little something like this: There once was a conservation biologist who was just starting her new career at a farm animal sanctuary. She was thrilled to begin and learn about the many different animals, the goats, chickens, sheep, and yes, even the pigs. As she was learning her daily tasks for her new job, she came to the time of day when she would prepare the food for the pigs.

What the young scientist witnessed was fascinating. The pigs ran all the way to the other side of their pen before returning to her where their food had been placed. She asked another one of the biologists, why do these pigs run to one side before they come over to get their food? Her colleague did not have an answer. Not to be deterred, the biologist started digging into this species of pig and where they had been located before coming to the sanctuary. Still, no variables checked out. Finally, a retired biologist who had previously worked for the sanctuary came for a visit.

Our researcher began preparing the feeding station for the hungry pigs and as always, they would scramble to the other side of the pen before returning to devour their food. The retired biologist had seen all of this and was now laughing. “They still run to that side first after all these years. When we remodeled this space, we moved the feeding station from that side to this one. Most of these pigs don’t even remember the old pen but they must keep teaching each other to go over there first!”

Social creatures follow social habits. While pigs may get a bad rap for their hygiene, they are intelligent creatures who can learn to follow a crowd just like we do. These pigs had developed a habit over time that even after losing its purpose, the habit persisted and was passed down. Our social location has a big impact on our habits and behaviors.

Before I talk any more about habits or social location, I want to return to the story of Jesus and Thomas. Thomas often gets hit really hard on this Sunday, the others believed without seeing but he was the one who wanted the proof. The judgement cast on Thomas is pretty astonishing though. This is a once in a lifetime situation and the other disciples *did* get to see Jesus. Is the expectation to just have faith no matter what?

Rene Schreiner, a professor from Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, wrote about the original Greek and this translation. The root Greek word that is translated

to belief and faith in this passage actually had a wider ranging meaning than what is used in our English today.

This word can actually fully incorporate the concept of trust. Trust, something not quite as cerebral as belief. Trust involves how we feel, how we relate to one another. When I say I trust you, this can be as much trust as giving you my social security number or trusting you'll say hi to me when I pass by you on the street. We often make our decisions on what we believe based on who we trust.

Trust helps us get to a more expansive understanding of the nature of Jesus and Thomas' conversation. Thomas certainly did not trust the other disciples who brought to him this amazing news of resurrection of the Messiah. The admonition Jesus has of Thomas feels different if we are thinking through this lens of trust. "Have you trusted because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to trust."

Jesus' call is not one to leave our brains behind to, turn off rationale, and to forget that we are humans in a finite world. Instead, this call is one to trust that God has more power and can do more than we can comprehend or understand. That God's grace and love surpasses knowledge or any other rationale we can affix to it. God is greater than our Earthly constraints.

God is love, God loves this world, and God desires that we share love with one another throughout creation. Our trust in God is a glimmer of hope, no matter how irrational it may seem. That prayer for justice where injustice reigns or for peace

when war rages. God can do more in this world than we can ever expect and we come to trust that God can work through us, broken and sinful, to create new life and love in this wonderful creation.

We live in a time where a common social habit is to check out. To not be overly invested in anything or to stop trying when we know we can't win. Find what we are best at and stick to that, someone else will figure it out, don't get overly invested in anything because that vulnerability could come back around. Apathy often creeps in to our daily lives.

While I never want to assume what our abilities or resources are, I can share a few examples from my own life of the simple times this culture pushes me towards indifference. I know I am not anywhere near the #1 polluter in Illinois, in Chicago, or even in Hyde Park. Why does it matter than, if I let the water run while I'm brushing my teeth? It's not going to hurt anyone if I jump in my car to drive the few blocks to the store instead of walking. I can just buy another plastic water bottle instead of bringing my reusable one.

It's true each one of these individual actions are not going to make or break the fight against rapid climate change and in truth, all of these actions put together through my life still might not amount to much on their own.

But those social habits, the willingness to trust and be earnest in a culture that is used to discouragement and fear is where hope shines through. We are so used to running that one way, just like that biologist observed. Sure, earnestness and

passion might earn some scoffs at school or at the office but this is also where God's revelation and hope peeks in to others' lives.

Despite this discomfort, when we teach and inspire one another to be better stewards of God's creation, the kin-dom of God is branching out in new places and people. There is hope and new possibility in our times of despair and it starts when we engage with the apathy passed on to us and let that go for new faith, life, and resurrection in Christ and in each other. Those small actions make a difference.

Let holy inspiration shine through us as we move to preserve the Earth and in the fight for justice and equality for those pushed to the margins. That trust will continue to grow out as God shapes a new world that we enter. A trust that is deeper in a God that we may not see and in a person that we do not know. A trust that inspires us to live earnestly into our faith, into God's mission, and to hold onto hope given to us through Jesus Christ. Amen.