

Vicar's Sermon

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Subject : Having doubts is natural.

We're told that after His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples many times in ways that proved beyond doubt that He was alive. But obviously that wasn't true for everyone because even here in these last few verses of Matthew's Gospel as Jesus is just about to ascend to His father in heaven we're told that some of His disciples doubted that He had been raised from the dead. Most of them worshipped Him but some doubted. You'd have thought that everyone, by now, would have been convinced but obviously not: which just goes to show that doubt is an integral part of our human nature. And these were people who had had the benefit of seeing Jesus face to face!

So, what about us? If you have doubts, and which one of us at times doesn't, then don't feel that this rules you out of being a true disciple of Jesus. Jesus told the remaining eleven disciples to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee: it was probably the same mountain on which He had been transfigured earlier in His ministry: in other words it was a familiar place. You yourselves might have places that are very special to you in terms of meeting with God: it may be a particular church, or beach: a hillside or a country lane. But wherever it is I do encourage you to re-visit and to cultivate your attachment to it because places that hold particular or precious memories for us are very important for our spiritual and emotional well being. I don't suppose, for example, that St Paul ever forgot the place on the Damascus Road where He encountered the risen Jesus for the first time!

And it's significant that all the disciples made their way to this mountain even the ones whose hearts and minds were full of doubt. It didn't prevent them from going. Doubt is natural and I would say necessary in developing a real and honest relationship with God but we must be careful that it doesn't stop us in our tracks and therefore block the path that leads us closer to Jesus. To put it bluntly: I don't mind how many doubts and uncertainties you come through the door with so long as you make it through the door!

Neither should we forget that each of those eleven disciples were to go on to witness for Jesus throughout the known world: they were the ones who, filled with the Spirit of God, went on to establish the church and spread the Gospel. It is because of the life and witness of those men that we are gathered here today. So if any of you have any doubts about whether God can use you because of your doubts then doubt no more because He can and He will.

All of those men were to suffer for their faith and all of them, except one, were to die for their faith. Jesus really was sending them out like lambs among wolves and yet they were not powerless. Jesus said to them "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me: Go then and make disciples of all nations." The power, both in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus but it is us that He sends out into the world. We have no power of ourselves to achieve or accomplish anything but we don't need to have because we go in the power that God alone supplies. I wonder if you've ever been in a situation in which you feel completely weak and vulnerable: well, don't panic, because you have the power of heaven and earth behind you! If you're in a situation now that appears hopeless to you then please remember that, with God, all things are possible. You may feel that what I'm saying is untrue and you may have doubts about the outcome but don't let this stop you from edging forward in faith.

Yes, by now some of you might have discovered the apparent flaw in the argument, in that most of those disciples died for their faith. "Some victory!" I can hear you exclaim. But you're all here aren't you today? You wouldn't be had they not followed Jesus command to go out into all nations and make disciples in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their suffering, their witness and their death has led to your life. The power of God is revealed in weakness just as Jesus

conquered evil by hanging and dying on the Cross. Having the power of God behind you doesn't mean that you'll have it easy but that through you God's purpose will be achieved.

And then His parting words to them were "And know that I am with you always even to the end of the world." You're never alone no-matter what you're facing and God's perspective is not just confined to your lifetime but to eternity and His sphere of operation is not just this earth but the universe and universes beyond this one and for all eternity.

It's more than our finite and limited brains can take in: no wonder we doubt! But this you need not doubt, that whatever happens God is in it with you and He who is all powerful, just and faithful, will not let you down either in this world or the world to come.

Amen.

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