

SERMON Pastor Cris

The Easter story began in the pre-dawn darkness as Mary journeyed from grief to confusion to joy – and probably still a fair amount of confusion. She ran twice to the disciples, concerned the first time over the missing body, and the second time, proclaiming, “I have seen the Lord!”

We don’t know what the disciples made of Mary’s story. We don’t know that they believed. We know that they were afraid. That evening, just a few hours later, they were locked in a room in fear of the authorities. And they were probably right to be.

We know from later accounts – mostly from the book of Acts, that the news of the resurrection wasn’t accepted by the establishment in those early days. We know that the authorities had plotted with the power of Rome to destroy everything that Jesus had proclaimed and done. The resurrection didn’t change the world’s understanding of who Jesus was. The hostility toward the good news continued. And so the disciples were afraid.

One of my favorite movies is *Hook*, a reimagining of the Peter Pan story. It came out in 1991 so no apologies for any spoilers. If you haven’t seen it, I highly recommend it. How can you go wrong with Steven Spielberg directing Robin Williams, Dustin Hoffman, Julia Roberts, and Maggie Smith?

The story *Hook* tells is what happens when Peter decides to grow up. He chooses to do so out of love for Wendy’s granddaughter, and becomes a lawyer named Peter Banning. In fact, he becomes a corporate takeover lawyer – the business equivalent of a pirate. Life seems great. He has 2 kids and is very wealthy. But then Captain Hook shows up again and kidnaps his children.

Peter, with no memory of who he really is gets dragged back to Neverland to discover his children are in the hands of a diabolical, actual pirate, who is threatening to kill them if Peter doesn’t fight him. So, Tinkerbell takes Peter to the Lost Boys to get him ready.

Of course, the Lost Boys don’t believe that this aging, out-of-shape **lawyer** is the Pan. They laugh at him. They chase him. They pick on him. The leader of the Lost Boys draws a line in the sand and demands that the Lost Boys choose...follow the lawyer or follow him. And then one of the smallest among them approaches Peter – with no shame or tact – and starts to touch his face, to push around his skin. And when he uses both hands to push Peter’s face into a smile, he says, with all the conviction within him, “Oh, there you are, Peter.”

The Lost Boys start to believe that what they always hoped would be true, was finally true...that Peter had returned to them and they wouldn't have to be afraid of Captain Hook anymore. Of course, it doesn't happen all at once, and Peter – the one who is the object of their belief has to learn to believe again too. Nothing in the story works without belief. Peter can't fly if he doesn't believe. He can't even eat if he doesn't believe.

And when they come to the final battle – the ultimate confrontation between the evil pirate and the hero in green tights, it takes the belief of all the Lost Boys, of his own kids, of everyone to win the day.

Peter's truth is revealed slowly over the course of the journey from a worldly successful, but actually unhappy lawyer to the hero who vanquishes a very bad man who needs his mommy. And it started when that little Lost Boy believed in him.

Thomas is often derided for his doubt. He's criticized unfairly – I think – for simply asking to have the same experience as the rest of the disciples. We don't know what happened in the week between these Jesus sightings, but we know that Jesus keeps showing up with an offering of peace. Jesus comes into the room filled with fear and brings God's peace so that the disciples, this time including Thomas, can be commissioned for what comes next.

If this entire Gospel was written so that the disciples and all who followed them would believe in the truth of Jesus, then this moment of revelation to Thomas is incredibly important. It might not rise to the level of the crucifixion and resurrection itself – the revelation of God's glory in the triumph of Jesus – but nowhere else in this whole story, does anyone so clearly identify Jesus as God in the flesh. “My Lord and my **God!**” Thomas says.

He didn't actually have to touch Jesus' wounds to believe it, but like that little Lost Boy who first recognized Peter, once he saw the truth, he **knew** it to be true. All that had come before was revealing who God is and God was standing right there in that room, telling him not to be unbelieving, but to be believing. It's not about doubt, it's about an active believe, a belief that is **lived**.

John uses the word translated as belief over 100 times and gives it special emphasis here. Note the clear summary of what this story was intended to do – “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...”

It's an active belief in what God had done on the cross and in the empty tomb so that he – Thomas – could tell it to the world.

And he does. Thomas confesses that Jesus is God and goes on to proclaim it for the rest of his days.

We tend to push belief into our heads, into an intellectual exercise about understanding the facts about God and the life of Jesus. I'm guilty of it myself, trying so hard to **think** my way into what God is doing and deciding what I can intellectually handle or prove. And it's not wrong to study and learn what we can. I think it matters that we understand what was happening in and around these stories that have been passed down for generations.

But sometimes, we need to get out of our heads and trust what we see in front of us. Sometimes we need to trust what we can metaphorically touch. Thomas is criticized as a "doubter", but what was really happening is that he was trying to hold onto the relationship he had had with Jesus. Thomas had been the one to try to follow Jesus into death when they were going to see Lazarus. Thomas had been the one to try to figure out where Jesus was going, because Thomas was **trying** to believe, **trying** to hold onto what he had hoped to be true.

And then Jesus showed up. In the midst of fear, in the midst of the confusion, in the midst of Thomas' demand for proof, Jesus shows up and says, "do not be unbelieving, but believing." "My Lord and my God!"

Peter Banning, the grown-up version of Peter Pan had forgotten everything he had learned in Neverland and thought he had figured out life. The touch of little fingers on his face led to the realization of who he really was and gave him the power to overcome evil.

For Thomas, seeing Jesus turned out to be enough. He didn't need to actually put his fingers in the wounds of Jesus to find his way back to belief. We can forget what we believe when the world presses us into a locked room of fear. But God keeps coming – keeps proclaiming peace to us. God keeps helping us believe that Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord and our God. Now and always. Amen.