

Low Sunday – April 7, 2013

St. Thomas is my patron saint. He embodies a skepticism that we readily understand in our age. Rather than accepting the word of his fellow disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead, he took a wait-and-see approach. Despite the testimony of others, Thomas boldly demands physical evidence in order to believe. In so doing, he creates a scornful identity that is attributed to him to this day, Thomas the Doubter. He also gets the opportunity to touch the post-Easter Jesus and get confirmation of the resurrection.

That show-me-state of mind reflects the evidential problem modern people struggle with. In some ways, we have oversimplified our approach to reality to the point that if we cannot prove something we assume it must not be true. John Searle, preeminent UC Berkley philosopher, demonstrates this common approach when he said, “On the available evidence we have about how the world works, we have to say that we are alone, there is no God, we don’t have a cosmic friend, we’re on our own. I might be wrong about that, but on the available evidence, that’s the situation we’re in.” (Free Inquiry: Fall 1998, 18:4 p. 39.)

Is something real even if we cannot prove it to be? Do we have to believe in order to see? Do we see and only then believe? I have experiences where I sense that something wholly other is with me. I cannot prove that it is God. I can only testify to what those moments mean to me. Fortunately, they serve to give me some strength during difficult times when I struggle with the question of God’s existence. While it may shock you that a clergyperson might not have certitude about the existence of God and the shape of things unseen, I do not know a single person that has not struggled with doubt at some point.

Because of my own experiences, bolstered by the witness of so many others past and present, I believe that God is real and present. However, I cannot eradicate all doubt. I do make an appeal to continued belief in the absence of philosophical proof and know that it is an appeal to faith. The most important element to my faith is the assumption that God remains, despite my skepticism.

Our church is one where rigorous honesty, serious debate, and gracious benefit of the doubt are extended to all. Indeed, we believe in a tremendous amount. (This will be made clear when we recite the Nicene Creed in a few moments.) We also make room for the periodic examination of our faith. We believe that God is big enough to handle it. And my hope is that after you have scrupulously consider the testimony of others and compared it to your own experience of the divine, that you will be able to say along with Doubting Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”