

Second Sunday of Easter - April 12, 2026

- Acts 2:14a, 22-32 - Psalm 16 - 1 Peter 1:3-9 - John 20:19-31

“Come to believe”

1. There is a lot of talk these days about Artificial Intelligence (or AI)
  - a. I remember seeing an article in the New York Times a few years ago which talked about images created by artificial intelligence.
    - i. It was an article trying to explain how the technology was different.
    - ii. Computers were beginning to learn rather than just spit out the information or calculations using the logic that had been framed for them in their software.
    - iii. At least that's how my mind understands it.
    - iv. The article said that AI was able to do what humans do which is learn and create something that is new, possibly unexpected, based on information they had gathered.
    - v. The picture that I remember seeing was that of a 1920s mobster taking a selfie with a cell phone.
    - vi. Obviously the image wasn't right because there were no cell phones in the 1920s, but the image was convincing to my brain.
    - vii. It looked like what I just described.
  - b. Artificially intelligence or AI technology is getting better and better at creating these kinds of images that look convincing to our brains.
    - i. In fact, other articles I have seen offer the reader a quiz asking us to discern whether pictures are a real photo or AI created.
    - ii. And honestly it's getting harder and harder for my eyes to discern correctly if a particular one was created by a machine or a human.
    - iii. One scary implication is that bad actors could create pictures or videos which are not real, which show a fictional scene.
    - iv. There is a BBC TV series about using AI to “create” evidence to convict criminals. It’s called The Capture (streams on Peacock)
    - v. As good as AI is getting, we may need new tools to determine if an image we see is fiction or nonfiction.
2. In today’s gospel story, Thomas needed to decide if something was true or not.
  - a. I have to recognize that the Church for centuries has given Thomas the disciple such a hard time for doubting.

- i. The passage tells us that Thomas who was not there with the rest of the disciples when Jesus appeared in the locked room where they were hiding,
  - ii. The disciples later tell Thomas all about it, but he expresses skepticism about whether Jesus had actually come to the disciples.
  - iii. But, that wasn't an unusual response.
  - iv. We fail to remember that each of the disciples had expressed their own skepticism about whether the news of the Resurrection was true.
  - v. The disciples had doubted the testimony of
    - 1. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.
    - 2. The two disciples who saw Jesus on the road to Emmaus
    - 3. And now they briefly doubted even Jesus, as he miraculously appeared in person to them after being raised from the grave
  - vi. Again, all of these followers were hearing from someone about the resurrection of Jesus, an event that seemed unbelievable or which they didn't understand.
  - vii. They were being reasonably suspicious and were trying to weigh whether or not something they were hearing about or seeing with their own eyes was true
- b. These days I would ask each of us to exercise healthy skepticism when seeing an image online, to consider whether it is real or AI-generated
- i. That's no different from how our faith Journey evolves through time.
  - ii. We may hear someone share a story from their life, and their interpretation of it, and we may ponder
    - 1. if it was truly God at work in healing them from cancer,
    - 2. or a coincidence that they barely missed an accident
    - 3. or a perfectly logical reason for how they got the new job
  - iii. We ourselves wonder if our internal feeling or nudging is really God
  - iv. We question. We wonder. We even doubt.
  - v. Faith is a gift from God to us, but these moments can help it grow.
- c. For centuries we have received the stories, interpretations and ponderings of humans telling us that they experienced God in this way or that.
- i. We read stories in the bible and internally interpret them
  - ii. We see paintings of Jesus and the disciples doing these things
  - iii. We hear sermons and try to glean something helpful for our journey
  - iv. That's not unlike Thomas the disciple.
- d. What Jesus said in that passage gives me a sense of hope and perspective.
- i. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

- ii. Jesus did ask Thomas not to doubt, but Jesus made it possible for Thomas to validate and resolve his doubts
    - iii. Thomas didn't seem to need to touch Jesus' wounds, but makes a statement of faith which the others hadn't yet made "My Lord and My God"
  - e. Jesus sent out the disciples to continue the work that Jesus had begun
    - i. To bring peace, to share the Holy Spirit
    - ii. To help others believe that Jesus is the son of God
    - iii. To forgive one another [there is that difficult verse that said the disciples could also retain the sins of some. That would require more study, but at least I'll say that the Greek word "retain" means "to use strength, i.e. seize or retain (literally or figuratively)" So somehow there is some letting go and some holding on; it's not clear to me how God is involved in either action] <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2902/kjv/tr/0-1/>
- 3. In Presbyterian theology, we lean into discernment being something we do together
  - a. Together we hear and learn from each other's experiences
  - b. Together we look for where God is at work in our lives and in the lives of others
  - c. Together we interpret the scriptures in light of what we know from science, history and culture
  - d. Rev. Betty Mixon, Tracy's pastor at Epworth United Methodist Church in Chicago while I was in seminary, would ask her congregation during the season after Easter to ponder where they were seeing signs of the resurrection in their everyday life.
    - i. It's a question that is hard for people to think about.
    - ii. It seems easier to notice the signs of death also all around us
      - 1. where we see people suffer under the evil of injustice
      - 2. where we see people trapped by active addiction
      - 3. where we see people betray the trust of a community
    - iii. But what Thomas shows us is that there is resurrection is all around us, if we are able to perceive it.
      - 1. where we see people turn their lives around
      - 2. where we see communities rally to recover after a tragedy
      - 3. where we see old ways of life slowly being buried to let the new blossom
- 4. Our journey of believing starts with the gift from God, our faith. But that faith is not something static or perfect. It questions, it grows, it imagines, it interprets, not in isolation, but in community.

5. The story is not about Thomas, but about Thomas returning to be in the midst of the other shocked disciples so that together they could get on with the work Jesus had for them.
  - a. Thomas was a person of faith making a decision that not only that the person before him was his risen teacher,
  - b. but also that the community which surrounded him and the work that lay ahead of them were being guided by God,
    - i. that surprising God who doesn't let death have the last word,
    - ii. who doesn't let injustice or death or sin win at the end of the game.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-2019-31-21>

[https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/technology/ai-technology-progress.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.ZIA.0h9p.s25l5qhryEoy&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/technology/ai-technology-progress.html?unlocked_article_code=1.ZIA.0h9p.s25l5qhryEoy&smid=url-share)

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2902/kjv/tr/0-1/>

#### Reflection questions

1. Share a time when you struggled with your faith, perhaps because of doubt.
2. What makes the reactions of the other disciples (Luke 24:9-12, Luke 24:41) similar or different than the reaction of Thomas (John 20:19-31)?
3. What have been the moments which made you grow in your faith? Who was there to help you in that process?