

So today's scriptures focus on doubt - determining the authenticity of a thing, a person. The title doubting Thomas is not part of scripture - it is a title appended to this scripture and has become perhaps more well known than the scripture itself. It makes Thomas appear to be the only doubter - in a room full of those who have already seen for themselves. And which of us, given the chance, wouldn't want to see the Risen Christ. Perhaps Thomas should be called brave or courageous - confessing his need for first hand confirmation. Jesus doesn't deride him or withhold from him, Jesus shows up for Thomas and offers his wounded side for Thomas to touch. A good lesson for all of us, in expressing doubt, voicing the reality of the state of our faith, we are giving Jesus something to work with. As much as Jesus' authenticity, this scripture expresses Thomas' authenticity - no other doubters spoke up, just Thomas. Perhaps this incident, where Jesus obliges Thomas is one of the factors that keeps the disciples together.

That energizes them to teach, to offer forgiveness, to fill Jerusalem with the word of God. They were obviously being successful - you don't bring a failure before the council. The High Priest is hoping that Peter and the disciples will go the same way Theudas' followers did at his death; the same way followers of Judas the Galilean scattered once their leader had perished. It seems like a simple way for Judaism, for life, to go back to normal. It is a common reaction to a movement causing trouble, thinking that removing the leader of a movement will end the movement. Perhaps the thought of removing Putin has crossed a mind or two in this room. But here their teacher, Jesus the Christ, has been dead for a while and no evidence of failure or despair is manifesting itself. In fact, with the disciples spreading the word they are able to reach more people than those who encountered Jesus face to face.

Rabbi Gamaliel, a well known and respected Pharisee, teacher of the Law proposes a test for the authenticity of Jesus' teaching. Rather than kill the followers who are spreading the Good News, why not just let it collapse of its own missing center. Time will tell, is what he is saying in essence. And, Gamaliel adds words which testify to his authenticity - if the expected dispersal does not happen, they may be in danger of going against God. Gamaliel's reluctance to decide the true message of God for himself illustrates the depth of his love for God.

Many of us take a position and if evidence that contradicts it is given we explain it away rather than consider it, open to it. Or maybe you've had the opposite experience where obstacle after obstacle impedes a plan and we say, well I guess it wasn't meant to be or maybe God is trying to tell us something. If obstacles are thrown in our path, we can take it as an attempt to discourage us or a test of our determination, the authenticity of our plans.

So this is the Sunday that we, the ministry team, decided I should start talking about my upcoming retirement.

In thinking about retirement, I think about my call to ministry, my first settled pastorate, my arrival here.

Profiles - mine and churches

Identify churches you are interested in

Some churches take the initiative and send their profile directly to a candidate.

3 churches

Interviews

Neutral pulpit

Robe

Radio

Tooth falls out - tape recording

Was this God trying to tell me something? Already I was questioning whether I was REALLY called to ministry. Always imagining that the hearts of others around me glowed more brightly for God than mine. One of the church contingents wanted to take me to lunch after the service. Lispe

Remarkably enough, two of the churches called the next day and offered me the position.

Didn't prove anything about whether the tooth was a sign of God's call to me.

I served the church in Vermont for 3 years

Then I moved to be with Carol

Found the opening of this church - asked for my profile to be sent

Didn't Hear anything

Carol made me call

You hadn't received it

Was that a sign of the authenticity of my call - was it genuine or not.

No. that one incident wasn't God's statement - it was the incompetence of the office manager

Neither of these calls – each with hiccups that played with my already vulnerable self esteem - neither of them had was a stamp of authenticity or falsehood.

There is no one moment, one test, one failure, one tooth falling out that declares authenticity. Authenticity in God's call doesn't happen because of one party, one person, a pastor, a reverend. Authentic ministry happens between people; Christianity isn't an entity for someone to have, to hold onto, to dole out in chapter and verse. Authentic ministry needs community; Authentic ministry is us; We are authentic - in part because we've weathered the years together, but more because we've worked together, we've served food together, we've cleaned together, we've cried together and we've celebrated together. I don't know where I fall on the scale of authenticity; I don't know where you fall on that scale but I do know that together we are authentic lovers of God and each other.