

Sermon Title: **“How To Believe”**

Bible: **John 20:19-31**

When: on the 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 27, 2025

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Doubting Thomas

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! We continue to celebrate the joy of the resurrection. But it is not always easy to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even the twelve apostles could not believe in the resurrection at first. As we read in the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus Christ appeared to the disciples. The disciples saw the risen Christ with their own eyes, and they talked with him. However, one of the twelve, Thomas, was not there when Jesus appeared at first. When the other disciples shared the joy of Jesus' resurrection, Thomas said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thomas could not believe it. So, he got his famous nickname of Doubting Thomas.

Thankfully, the risen Jesus Christ appeared again to the disciples, including Thomas. Jesus showed his marks or his scars in his hands and in his side to Thomas. As Doubting Thomas saw Jesus with his own eyes, Thomas believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How about

us? Is there anyone who believed, because you saw Jesus with your own eyes? As Jesus mentioned, we are the blessed ones who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Even if there are many reasons to come to church, our risen and living Jesus Christ is the reason why we are here today. Then, how can we believe in Jesus Christ, who is the risen and living God?

2. Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Have you heard of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral? We have four sources in order to know, believe, and reflect the Divine one: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. This is a part of our Book of Discipline about Theological Guidelines: “Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture is primary, revealing the ‘Word of God’ so far as it is necessary for our salvation.” The Scripture means the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, which have a total of 66 books in our church. Tradition means the two-thousand history of the Christian Church. Many beautiful hymns and songs are not in the Bible. Easter egg hunts are not in the Bible. But these can be examples of tradition. Reason is rational thinking and sensible interpretation. Please do not be surprised. I have read the Bible from cover to cover several times, but I cannot find the United Methodist Church anywhere in the Bible. Is it okay to gather here as a church? And we cannot find Korean pastors and female pastors in the Bible. Is it okay to have Korean pastors and female pastors? Thanks to reason, according to our context, we can gather as a United Methodist Church and we can

have Korean pastors and female pastors, right? Experience means our faith stories and journeys, and if I may, I would like to say that it is not only personal ones but also our communal experience in Christ. African Americans have Black Theology, so when we sing some African Spiritual hymns, we can feel the “soul.” Latin America has liberation theology, which emphasizes God’s preferential option for the poor or the vulnerable. Koreans have Minjung Theology, or People’s theology. Like the “soul” in Black Theology, Koreans have “han,” the historical suffering and bitterness or crying for liberation and social justice out of the oppression by foreign rule and military dictatorships. And all of the Christians on the earth have experienced the same pandemic of COVID-19. There has been a big theological debate about online worship and communion. And now we recognize and accept livestreaming worship and online communion as well.

3. John Wesley’s Personal Experience and My Experience

I think that among four sources, experience is the most powerful and vivid! And I would like to share a couple of experiences of our founder, John Wesley. In 1736, John and his brother Charles Wesley were on board a ship headed to America, as Anglican missionaries. And they encountered a terrible storm. I assume that John prayed a lot to calm the storm. But the storm did not stop, and began to grow in strength, and the people on board were in danger of shipwreck. John could not help but be afraid he might die. But the Moravians in the midst of the brutal storm hosted a worship service, praising God. John was so surprised at the peace of the Morvians even in the storm, or in imminent danger of death. Even though John was

sent as a missionary, he confessed his lack of spiritual comfort and certainty. He struggled and wrestled with this experience for the next few years. On Wednesday, May 24, 1738, after two years, John wrote in his diary: “On Wednesday, May 24, in the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, [a Moravian meeting] where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ. I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and felt an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Like the doubting Thomas, our founder John Wesley had similar moments of doubting and struggling in his faith journey. But he had the moment of his heart being strangely warmed.

Because I was born into a Christian family, I was raised as a Christian. The church was like my home and my playground. I just loved the church. But when I was in college, I experienced a big conflict in the church. My mentor, who was an associate pastor for college students, had to leave the church and finally stopped his career as a pastor, because of the conflict between the church and the senior pastor. I could not go to church. And I could not even pray. As you might know, silence is one of God’s languages. But somehow that silence of God, or the Spirit's intervention bothered me a lot. Romans 8:26-27 says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows

what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” So, I went to a monastery to pray. That monastery was famous for its silent spiritual practice. Only during the meal time or worship service, people could break the silence and participate. Otherwise, people needed to keep silent. While I was silent there, I faced that bothering silence of God. I could not help but pour out my anger, my disappointment, and my sadness, all of my emotions, and I burst into tears and I could not stop crying. That moment, I met Jesus Christ, who was on the cross, who embraced all of my emotions and anger, questions, and confusion. That experience changed me. That experience still encourages me to become a better Christian and a better pastor, and to have another experience with God.

I believe that we are all on our faith journeys, because the risen and living God is with you and in you. When God reveals God’s love and grace, when God talks with you in silence, when it is God’s timing, please catch that moment! Then, that experience will change you, transform you, and guide you. God is already praying for you. And we are also praying for you. May God’s revelation be with all of us, like the Doubting Thomas, our founder John Wesley, you, and me.

Closing Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, we come to your holy presence. We come to your amazing love and grace. Please help us and guide us to open our eyes and ears to you. You are our Lord and our God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.