**Easter 2, April 7, 2013:** [**John 20:19–31**](http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=231783414)**, The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

**On each Sunday at a certain point in the service (right after the sermon and before the prayers) we all stand and recite the words of the Nicene Creed found on page 358 of the Book of Common Prayer. Please open to that page now: p. 358. A Creed is a formal statement of what we believe. These are ancient words, defined by the leaders of the church who gathered together in a city called Nicea in Turkey back in the year 325. They all were called together by Roman Emperor Constantine. because there was a serious need for the church to make clear what we believe (and what we don't believe) to be true. Specifically, the Creed defined the nature of Christ -- and quieted down huge controversies that were raging at the time about who Jesus was. In the Nicene Creed we reaffirm we believe in only One God. Then, there are three sections, one for each of the three persons of the one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus got the most lines; the story of Jesus' life is here, from His birth through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, to His coming again (which is what our Revelation reading was about this morning). Jesus is and was and is to come. Yes, "Alleluia, He is risen" and God will come back to finish the work that Easter let loose. The story is not over yet; things are not perfect here on earth, and God knows this. This is Good News of hope. The Creed is the most complete expression of the Christian faith, and it is recited on Sundays by ~ 2 billion people throughout the world.**

**So we recite the familiar words of the Creed Sunday after Sunday. The words have become so familiar that we say them quickly without thinking too much about what they mean. They mean a lot! They aren't just words, they are declarations: statements of what we believe. And, I don't know if you ever noticed this, but there is no room for uncertainty in them -- the Creed does not give us qualifications or caveats like "We think we believe that....." or "We will try to believe that..." ...or "We have doubts about whether...." No, the Creed says "We believe...."**

**Today, our Gospel reading is about the apostle who doubted that Jesus had really risen from the dead: "doubting Thomas." Thomas had missed seeing the risen Christ, when He appeared to the other apostles, and so he did not really believe that Jesus had risen! He had to see for himself. We empathize with Thomas because we might have been the same -- after all, having a person in your midst who is fully divine and fully human who used to be dead and now is alive is really hard to believe. This is not a videogame or a Sci-Fi movie, this is real.**

**OK. So, imagine that you are standing face-to-face with Jesus. Now, imagine that you are saying the words of the Nicene Creed--- and Jesus sees into your heart. Does Jesus see doubt in your heart, as He saw in Thomas' heart? What does Jesus do with our doubt? Is doubt a terrible thing that we should try to hide? The fact of the matter is: we all doubt. Doubt is almost a universal fact of life. A recent book called "Dealing with Doubt" by Oxford scholar Gary Habermas reports that there are, in fact, seven Greek terms used for the various aspects of doubt in the New Testament. And, our doubt can stem from different sources: facts, emotions, or will. For example, we can doubt because of old wounds, or because we don't trust God, or because we see others of faith being hypocrites. We can doubt because we don't really believe our sins are forgiven, or we can doubt because we are full of worry. Thomas' source of doubt had to do with proof. He was an evidence guy (like the "show me" State of Missouri) he had to see for himself to believe. So what is the bottom line here: should we be ashamed if we, like Thomas, have some uncertainties about Christianity? Jesus provides us the answer in how He reacted to Thomas: Jesus acknowledged Thomas' doubt, and showed him -- He gave him the evidence he needed to believe.**

**So, what should we do with our doubt? In my life, I have mostly found doubt to be a good thing -- because when doubts have arisen in me, they have produced growth in me. Before growth occurs, there is wrestling: doubt is not comfortable - but oh my, if we keep moving with our doubts it really pays off. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Roman Williams, and Roman Catholic nun Joan Chittister wrote this in a recent book: "...when reason fails to satisfy our awareness of what is clearly unreasonable and clearly real at the same time...Then only the doubt that opens our hearts to what we cannot comprehend...can lead us to the purer air of spiritual truth.  Then we are ready to move beyond the senses into the mystical, where faith shows us those penetrating truths the eye cannot see." As we move forward with our doubts, taking them to the Lord in prayer, questioning, and through Bible study, our hearts are opened in new ways! Our faith increases when we take the time to pursue the truth, like Thomas did. This is a safe place to wrestle with our doubts, just as it was a safe place for Thomas to express his doubts that day in the Upper Room.**

**The Holy Spirit has a big role in here as well -- as we pray for answers, the Holy Spirit opens doors in a variety of ways to give them to us. In today's Gospel it says, Jesus "*breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit."* The Spirit, also part of the Nicene Creed, has been breathed on you too! The Spirit may stir you up to ask me questions, the Spirit may lead you to look for answers in the Bible. So, doubts are OK to have....but it is not OK to stay stuck with your feelings of doubt. You have to keep moving facing your uncertainties here in this safe place, and trusting that the answers will come as you take the time to seek them. Being a Christian involves perseverance -- we hang in there in faith, together.**

**The Lord has issued YOU an invitation to believe in Him, your Savior and Lord, who died and rose and is alive for you. How your heart and our will responds to this invitation is what matters. Do you move ahead in trust, committing yourself to Christ? Do you allow yourself to ask the questions in your heart? Do you respond to the risen Christ like Thomas did, saying: "*My Lord and my God*." This Easter season, as you are face-to-face with the risen Christ, may you, like Thomas, say to Jesus from your heart and your will, "*My Lord and my God!"* And He will respond with great love throughout the rest of your life, *"Peace be with YOU." Amen.***