

Twice in my life, I have attempted to climb mountains and failed. The first was Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan. Walking stick in hand, hiking boots laced snugly, I stood at the mountain's base, ready to conquer the 12,000-foot climb. But just before my companions and I embarked, we saw other climbers turning back down the path. A storm front was pushing in, and dense fog enveloped the area. Our group considered the option to start climbing and seek shelter in one of the emergency huts if things got bad. I wanted desperately to go forward, to experience that breathtaking view from the top. But ultimately, doubt and fear drove me back.

The second attempt was not really a mountain: it was the world's largest monolith, Ayers Rock, in Australia's outback. At just 1,100 feet high, I figured this would be a piece of cake. This time, I would make it to the top. I would be stunned by the view—by the golden peaks of sun seeping over the yawning red earth. But as we started out before dawn, our guide spouting ominous warnings of travelers who'd met their demise, I caught sight of the actual plaque at the base memorializing those lost. Visions of falling to my death flashed

through my head, doubts pressed upon me. In the end, I “settled” for the five-mile trek around the perimeter. The beauty of the desert sunrise, and a keen sense of the area’s sacredness to the native Aboriginal people, helped me hurdle my disappointment.

Doubt is a natural human emotion. Consider the apostle Thomas, namesake of a slogan that bears somewhat negative connotations: “Don’t be such a Doubting Thomas.” Evolved from Scripture to find its place in secular conversations, the term actually has an entry in Merriam Webster: “an incredulous or habitually doubtful person.”

We might consider, though, that Thomas has gotten a bit of a bad rap. After all, he had only the word of his fellow disciples to go on that his beloved teacher had reappeared. He himself hadn’t actually seen the risen Lord. So, he wondered: how could such a thing be? But then he sees, puts his hands in Jesus’ flesh, and cries out, My Lord and My God!

We often speak of faith as believing without seeing. We pray for stronger faith. We downplay our doubts. But doubt can

be useful, something that helps us navigate unfamiliar, potentially dangerous terrain.

Jesus' earlier teachings tell us that faith as small as a mustard seed is enough to move a mountain. A mustard seed leaves a whole lot of room for doubt. Interestingly, Jesus doesn't berate Thomas for his doubt. Instead, he meets Thomas where he is in that moment, just as Jesus will soon appear to the disciples as they're fishing in the Sea of Galilee—returned, it seems, to their old lives. He will give *another* sign so they may come to believe. He will appeal to Peter, “Feed my lambs.” “Take care of my sheep.” “Follow me.”

After Jesus' horrifying death, after the empty tomb, after seeing their teacher reappear, the disciples faced a turning point: Would Jesus' teachings die on the cross? Or would they be able to carry them forward in his name?

At this point in our history, we too are facing a turning point, wedged at the intersection of fear and doubt. Experts are only beginning to mine the landscape of the pandemic's psychological and social impact. Things ranging from

increased depression and anxiety, to higher rates of alcohol consumption, to a surge in domestic violence—and beyond. And we know underserved communities have been hit disproportionately hard by all of these, and more.

We scan the news and see yet another senseless incident of gun violence, another image of people disregarding public health protocols, another painful day of testimony about the death of George Floyd, just one of many Black lives tragically lost across our nation.

On so many levels, we face doubt: as individuals, as members of faith communities, as Americans. With all this, we, like the disciples, may find ourselves wanting to stay in our safe spaces, away from the darkness of the world.

The disciples, reeling from the loss of their teacher, had returned to a place where they'd felt comfortable and loved—the last place they'd seen Jesus alive—the upper room. They felt fear, but at least they were in a familiar place.

And then Jesus arrives: Peace be with you. See the wounds I've borne for the world—the visible, tactile evidence of my love for you. And now, as the Father has sent me, I send you.

The disciples may have frozen on the spot. Send us? Send us where? Why? It's dangerous out there. How can Jesus expect this of us?

In their fear, the disciples may have been slow to catch on. But ultimately, they do—building the Church around the world. Despite their doubt and disbelief, they moved forward.

As we navigate to a “new normal” in the coming months, we may be experiencing uncomfortable levels of doubt. What's next? What will things look like from here? We may feel we have little to give. We may be afraid of extending ourselves in a world that feels so utterly unhinged.

It would be easy to fixate on getting back to our personal normal—to the way things were. But all around us, the world is changing. Opportunity abounds to allow ourselves to be sent, to bring Christ's light to a deeply hurting world.

My Lord and My God! But surely, not me? You must mean someone else. I'm a mess. I can barely keep it together. I've got other responsibilities. There's nothing special about me. And I'm tired, oh so tired, of all of this... Doubt. So much doubt.

You may have heard the popular saying that God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. A more literal application to today's Gospel would be that Jesus doesn't send the equipped, he equips the sent.

We are a resurrection people, sent by Jesus, equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit. The advocate that dwells within us, as present as the very breath we breathe. And as we rejoice in the risen Lord, we must be willing to leave our safe spaces, to push past our fear, and go forth.

Whether that's up the mountain or around it will differ for each of us. But scripture does reveal some common things about the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of being sent as Christ's disciples.

We are sent, as today's Epistle reveals, to have fellowship with one another. Not just within our church walls and across our backyard fences, but out in the world: to feed Jesus' lambs, to take care of his sheep, to pursue the kingdom vision of not a needy person among us.

We are sent to places unknown, unfamiliar, and often uncomfortable. The apostles spread Christianity from Jerusalem to Damascus, to Asia Minor, to Greece, and Rome. St. Thomas is said to have gone as far as India, Saint Matthew to Ethiopia, and Saint Bartholomew to Armenia. Many of them died martyrs for the cause of Christ.

We may not be called to mission trips around the globe, but as we consider the socially and economically disadvantaged communities around us that have borne the brunt of this pandemic—that continue to suffer the pervading inequities plaguing this nation—we may ask ourselves how far from home we will be willing to venture for the cause of Christ.

We are sent, not just at a particular moment, but across the span of time and space: Yesterday. Now. Tomorrow. Just as

Jesus sent forth the disciples even in their time of turmoil, so too are we sent continuously, every moment a chance to show the love of Christ. Our own church family does this in so many ways, across so many ministries—from our outreach to our pastoral care to those who help prepare for worship—Christ Church is generous in spirit and love.

As we're sent to places and situations less familiar, we are assured we are sent with agency, by the power of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit that consecrates us and guides us to do God's will. It's true, some days we may be unable to turn the bolt and step over the threshold. But even from within our safe spaces, we can pray for courage—for God to open our hearts to his plan. And as we sit in his presence, we know the Holy Spirit will step through the doorway with us, our ever-present comforter and companion. Eventually, we can choose to unlock the door.

This is not a single momentous turning point of transformation—it's a choice, every day, every hour, every minute. We may be eager to see the injustices of the world solved, the pain vanquished, the darkness recede—to see the



view from the top of the mountain. But resurrection work is a slow and steady climb.

Every day is a choice to leave our cloistered spaces and allow ourselves to be sent. We needn't feel we must be fully formed, for just as the saints before us have wandered, lost their footing, and found their way again, we too can embrace the mysteries of God shaping our lives. Formation is a life-long endeavor. We needn't know exactly how the plan will unfold, only trust that it will unfold as God intends.

Jesus meets us in the moments of our deepest doubts, showing us his wounds born of love—driving us to seek out new paths. Let us forge past our fear and move forward as a resurrection people, equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit—praying and rejoicing, as the psalmist says, “Oh how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity.”

And may the peace of Christ be always with you.