

Easter 2, Youth Sunday, April 23, 2017
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Happy Earth Day!

Well, one day late. Yesterday was the 47th annual celebration of Earth Day, and this year it was marked in cities around the world by millions of people who participated in the March for Science – a grass-roots movement to celebrate science and draw attention to how important it is in our lives, our communities, and the world.

It's especially important in my life. I'm a senior in high school and I'm planning on going to college next year to study marine biology. I've been interested in science for as long as I can remember and have been actively involved in research since sixth grade.

Some people think about scientists as cold, calculating types, basing all their work on empirical evidence, data and results. "It's a scientific fact!" people will often say, derived from endless hours in labs, or in front of computers, or cataloging specimens. They don't believe anything unless they have cold, hard facts – proof. Thomas from today's Gospel kind of fits this model, doesn't he?

But I think scientists are dreamers – filled with imagination and inspiration. After all, where do all the ideas for these experiments come from? Scientists who have an idea, who believe something to be true, and have the faith and belief to look for ways to prove it.

What is faith? The actual definition of "faith" in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is "firm belief in something for which there is no proof." This is the right idea, but doesn't tell us exactly what faith is because "something" and "no proof" are kind of vague.

Over the last six years, I've conducted a lot of different experiments – some easy and straightforward, and some long, and drawn-out with no end in sight at times.

One in particular was about plant evolution and DNA testing. We were trying to find out if a kind of marine plant called rockweed had evolved into different species. So that meant that I had to go with my friend all around Long Island searching for rockweed. We had to check the shorelines all around Long Island from Brooklyn to East Hampton from January to July. It was definitely a ton of hard work.

The most challenging part was probably the fact that rockweed, which is supposedly very common on Long Island, was basically impossible to find. We did the trip many times throughout the span of two years, sometimes in the dead of the winter, and would come back with hardly any rockweed to show for it – especially in the beginning.

It was hard going. Not only was there no rockweed, but we had to convince our parents to drive us around all day, wading in freezing water, climbing over slippery rocks, and sometimes venturing onto private property in our search for the elusive *Fucus vesiculosus*.

But our faith in the project kept us going and through our ability to "believe in the weed" if you will, we ultimately collected enough rockweed to complete the experiments, leading ultimately at long last to a successful project.

In the Gospel today, we see the figure of doubting Thomas who wasn't present when the disciples all saw the resurrected Jesus. Thomas really wanted to see Jesus, but he says, "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." So then he sees Jesus and the holes in his hands and he believes. But after this, Jesus explains that Thomas should have believed before and says, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

While doubting and being skeptical are part of human nature, so are hope, belief, and faith and it is these attributes that inspire us – in church, at home, at work, and in the lab.

In fact, a lot of science is based on believing without seeing. The work of scientists is to inherently search for things they can't see. Take Watson and Crick across the street for example. They couldn't see the DNA, but they had hypotheses and believed it existed and as we all know, found it. I can understand why it's called blind faith.

This is because faith leads to discovery, whether spiritual or scientific. For Christians, faith is all about moving together towards unity with God and with each other. That's the discovery that Christians realize through faith.

As is usually the case, when Jesus says, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," he's speaking about a lot more than just Thomas not believing in the resurrection. He's suggesting that in times of darkness, when things are uncertain, if you keep the faith, hold on to your beliefs, things will be ok. And that's true in any context – inside of church or out – in ancient times or 2017.

So from now on, I will try to think about the faith and belief that Jesus talks about and apply it to the rest of my life. Taking a leap of faith, giving someone the benefit of the doubt, and believing without seeing are all fundamental ideas that can be very beneficial when applied to everyday actions, and can have unexpected consequences that lead to new discoveries otherwise thought impossible.

And the next time you're at the shore and you see some rockweed, think of me.