

April 23, 2017

Thomas's Doubt/ Our Doubt

PRAYER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our heavenly father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

SERMON

Every year the Sunday after Easter, we hear the story of Thomas. Did you see Thomas when you came into church this morning? If you didn't see him look around you. He's here. If you still don't see him, look closer. Look within yourself you may find him there. Thomas is the quintessential saint of the 21st century. He is the disciple who doubted. His name is synonymous with doubt. We even call him doubting Thomas.

Now we don't know where Thomas was or what he was doing on the evening of that first Easter day when Jesus the risen Christ came and stood among the disciples. We only know that he wasn't there. And because of this absence he missed out of this grand experience of a face to face encounter with the risen Christ. Imagine what impression that must have made upon those disciples. When they found Thomas, and told him, Thomas of course doubted. He couldn't believe it. I think Thomas gets a bad rap for that because calling him doubting Thomas leads us to the impression that maybe the other disciples had this profound faith that eagerly and openingly embraced the resurrection of Jesus.

But a quick look at the gospels shows us that their faith was no stronger than his. And in fact, he wants nothing more and nothing less than what the disciples have already received. I mean look at the disciples in Luke's gospel when women come running back to the tomb telling them him what they've seen. The disciples dismiss it as these crazy women. They think that the phonetic babbling of the women is a case of grief driven hysteria. It's beyond their imagination that this could be an act of God's redemption.

And in John's gospel when the disciples hear the news. Peter and their beloved disciple have their foot race to the tomb. And when they get there and step in Peter is perplexed. I'd rather imagine he was standing there scratching his head. Trying to figure out what had happened and what it means. Only the beloved disciple sees the empty tomb and believes that Jesus is risen from the dead.

So, the other disciples weren't exactly bashings of faith when they heard the news of the resurrection. It wasn't until they had their face to face encounter with the risen Christ that they fully embraced the good news of Easter. As we look at the story of Thomas I think there are two lessons we can gather from it. And the first is that whenever we have our doubts about the resurrection of Jesus, that's okay. And secondly, and more importantly, the risen Christ comes to us and makes himself known in the gathered community of the faithful.

Now let's look at the first one. That whenever we have our doubts in the resurrection. It's okay. Jesus expects our doubts. He's not troubled by them. He's bigger than our doubts. Jesus knows that the resurrection goes contrary to everything we know and understand about life and death. He rather anticipates that there will be doubt. If Jesus had wanted to put away all doubt. He probably would have struck Thomas down with a bolt of lightning or at least given him a good chewing out. But he doesn't do

that. He simply says, "Thomas look. Look at my hands, my feet, my side. Come here, you want to put your fingers in there go ahead. It's okay." And it's in that moment, in that experience as he sees the risen Christ face to face that Thomas makes his great confession, "My Lord and my God!"

In our times of doubt the risen Christ comes to us with words of reassurance. He says, "Look at the evidence, or the experience of the disciples, and we can trust that the evidence that they share with us is true. I mean think about it for a moment, you and I may be willing to die for something we know to be true and we believe in. But none of us is so foolish or downright stupid to die for something we know is not the truth. It is not real. We won't do that. We won't make that sacrifice.

In philosophy, there is a principle called Achkan's Razor, it says that the simplest expression or explanation of something is likely the most reasonable one. And the resurrection of Jesus is the only one that makes sense out of what happened with that disorganized, disheartened group of disciples before Easter. And the parade of band of witnesses after Easter. Every disciple except for John died a martyr's death. And most of those deaths were horrific. Given that all they had to do was say no, no, no, it really didn't happen. But not one of them recanted. All of them proclaimed that faith to the very end.

So, Jesus invites us to examine the evidence to look and to see is that he is risen, he is risen indeed. Now the second and even more profound truth is that the risen and living Christ comes to us in face to face encounters within the gathered community. Jesus the risen Christ is here this morning. He's here in the proclamation of the word. Where he reassures us of his abiding presence and love. That he holds us dear to his heart and he'll never let us go. He's hear in the proclamation of the word. Whenever a pastor or a priest faithfully and diligently prepares a sermon, the words of the sermon are literally Jesus speaking to us.

It's really a sacramental understanding of the office of preaching. That Jesus is literally here, embodied in the preacher, claiming his love for his people. And the risen and living Christ is here in the sacrament and the Eucharist. By his word and promise, he comes to us in these elements of bread and wine. And giving us his true body and blood. And in this way, Jesus is standing in our midst and giving us a face to face encounter. Every time we gather in this community, the risen Jesus is here showing us himself. In the bread and the wine, we are drawn into that sacramental union with Jesus where his body and blood come to us and so we can feel, touch, and even taste his presence in our midst. So, in this gathered community Jesus is here presenting himself to us so that our faith can be uplifted and encouraged and strengthened so that our doubts can be set aside. So that we too can believe with confidence the good news of the resurrection and hope that that brings to our lives.

Yes, Thomas is here this morning and he's with us and maybe within us. We're all a bit like Thomas. We all have our doubts. We're practical people and if we're going to believe something as wild and crazy as the resurrection and of someone who's been crucified. We want to see the evidence for ourselves. And so in the proclamation of the word and in the celebration of the sacrament. Jesus comes to us standing in our midst, showing himself to us. Stretching out his arms and hands so that we too can touch and feel and see and believe. And in this experience as we are gathered together with the risen Christ. May we too have our faith emboldened and may we too join with Thomas in his confession of faith. Saying, "My Lord and my God."

May that piece of God hat passes all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus.
AMEN