

April 8, 2018

## **Be Open to the Experience**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### SERMON

The second Sunday of Easter we always hear the story of the evening of the resurrection. We hear about the disciples gathered together still in fear. Still not understanding what the women had told them earlier in the day about going to the tomb and finding it empty. They're still trying to figure out and understand. What do we do now? How do we live this life? Now that the physical presence of Jesus has been taken away. What do we do and how do we do it?

Then Jesus is standing among them. He has come through the locked doors. He is present and yet he is different. His words to disciples, "Peace be with you." To try to calm their fears. He shows them, they experience the risen Lord. This the same Jesus that they had walked with. The same Jesus who had been crucified because he shows them the marks of the nails where he has been stabbed by the spear. They believe. They recognize. They understand. That the Lord that they had walked with, listened to, followed had now tamed a new life.

Now they were being given a new task. He breathed on them and the spirit of God comes upon them. As father has sent me so I send you. That task of the apostles to go and be witnesses. To teach, to preach, to share with the world what had taken place. So that all could believe. So that it was made available to all people.

Now it just so happens that Thomas wasn't there. Thomas gets a bad rap. He wasn't there in the room. We don't know why. When he makes it back, Jesus had already left. We don't know how long he stayed, we don't know how long Thomas was gone. All we know is that Thomas missed out on the experience. He didn't have the opportunity to see the risen Lord. He didn't have the opportunity to hear Jesus say to him, "Peace be with you." He didn't have the experience of Jesus breathing on them. Breathing on him the Holy Spirit.

When he comes in the disciples are all excited. We have seen the Lord. The women were right. He has been raised from the dead. He has given us a task to go and do as he did. Just as the father has sent him. He is now sending us out into the world. Is it any wonder that Thomas said, "Wait a minute? I understand that you guys saw this, experienced this. I haven't had that experience. How do you expect me to be like you? How do you expect me to have that same excitement? How do you expect me to have that same belief and surety of faith that you have not having that experience."

It was a whole week later. It must have been hard for Thomas that week, don't you think. All the other disciples, they're really excited, they're starting to go out, they're starting to teach and preach and be there. And Thomas is going I don't get it, I haven't gotten it. That next week, that next Sunday everybody is up in the room and this time when Jesus appears Thomas is there. Jesus goes right up to Thomas. Peace be with you. Come and look and see, experience what the other disciples have already experienced. Here put your fingers here. I want you to believe. I want you to have the experience. I want you to also be free and to believe and take away any doubts of yourself or of me. Know that you are my disciple, you are my apostle. I send you out just as I send the others out.

I can see that happening. I can see Thomas relieved that he was not left out purposefully. That he wasn't left out of the mission to go out and to be. That he wasn't less than the other disciples who had followed Jesus all that time. And all he had to do was be open to the experience. The experience that would come. The experience that did come. Then he could walk out. My Lord and my God. Free to believe. To walk out with assurance that he too was called to be an apostle. That he too was called to live out this life as a witness of the Messiah, of the Son of God.

All of us, I think, at one time or another have doubts. We question ourselves. Am I really in relationship with God? Am I really in relationship with Jesus Christ? Is it the right relationship? Is it the proper relationship? I don't always feel that Holy Spirit on me. I don't feel free to go out and to share my faith. Does that mean that I am less than others? Does that mean that I am not one of those chosen to be in the kingdom of God?

There are those people who have doubts that if the reality of Jesus as the Son of God is that true? We all have doubts not unlike Thomas. And like Thomas we need the experience. Christianity is a faith of experience. It's not a faith simply of hearing and believing and committing oneself because somebody else has said it is so. Christianity is about experiencing the presence of God.

Yes, we hear. Just like Thomas heard about their experience. But he needed the experience. We need the experience. We need to be able to hear and to be able to recognize what the experience of God, the Holy Spirit, the risen Lord is about from others just as Thomas did. But we also like Thomas need to have the experience. Not necessarily like Thomas had it or the original disciples had it. Most of us don't ever have that experience. But we do have the experience of God in our lives

if we are willing to attribute the experiences that happen in our lives and around our lives as the presence of God.

Doubts are only really problematic when we decide to live our life according to our doubts. Where we refuse to see the experience of God's hand in the world. Of God's hand in our own life. When we live our lives according to that doubt. I don't believe, I can't believe, I won't believe. Therefore, because of the experience is in that person's life. It's attributed to something else, fate, luck. Just the way life is. If it's good it's good, if it's bad it's bad. But this God thing can't buy into it. Won't buy into it.

Doubts are not terrible things. Doubts are those things that make us push to know more. To ask questions, to find out, to learn more about what the experience of God can be like in our lives. Then if we have a similar experience we can say yes that's God. That's God leading me. That's God pushing me. That's God present in the lives of these people in the ministry that they're doing. And I can be a part of that because I believe. Because I believe that life can be better lived in the presence of God.

I believe that life can be better if I am open to the presence of God, to the spirit of God in my life. To lead me to see deeper. To see beyond the surfaces to come to know the relationship in different ways. Not based simply on how someone else lives their life. Or the intention that I attribute to someone's behavior. But to try to be open. To see beyond. To see as God sees as in perfectly as I do that. But to allow that truth to be present in my life. To make my life better and to make the lives of those around me better as well.

We all have doubts. We all have questions. One of the neat things about doing the Thirst for Theology especially this last Thursday were people brought questions. Legitimate questions about scripture, about

faith, about living out a life of faith. And we didn't all agree. I told them what to think and to belief. (Laughter) And some of them just didn't quite get there. And that okay. You have to experience as I have experienced God. It's lead me to believe the way I believe. And it's different than exactly how you believe. And that's okay. God is leading you to where God wants you to be. God is feeding you who you need to be fed so that you can continue the journey. To make sense out of a world that often seems chaotic.

Embrace your doubts but don't let them rule your life. Listen to the experience of others so that you can see those experiences in your own life and in the world around you. And know that God is living in truth. That God's great love for us has led God to embrace creation. Enter into creation. Take the punishment for sinfulness on himself. So that he can continue to be just God ... A just God. Not just God. So that we can live our lives free. So that we can experience the presence of God. So that we can share that experience with others. So that they too may face their doubts and those doubts lead them to a deeper faith.

Priest – Father Greg Hein

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