

John 20:19-31

Second Sunday of Easter

“Believing Thomas”

Vicar Michael Larson

“Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Easter morning for most of the disciples did not begin with trumpets, processions, and Easter banners. On this day the disciples locked themselves up, I think in the upper room. The upper room where Jesus, four days earlier, had partaken with them in their Last Supper.

But now they locked themselves up from the world and bolted the door...for fear that the Jews and Roman soldiers would now seek out the followers of Jesus and deal with them in the same manner that their leader was nailed to a cross. One thing was sure, their Jesus was dead – dead as dead can be - wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in the tomb. They were sailors without a captain – or sheep without a shepherd – men, tossed about and scattered. The kingdom of heaven seemed just like a paradise lost – and a dream deferred.

It is clear that doubt, over above all else, was the overwhelming human emotion that swept over the nervous disciples that day. Huddled together in fear for their lives they were in disbelief about everything that had happened. Jesus was now dead and buried, and they feared for their lives.

The alleluia chorus from Handel’s Messiah was nowhere to be seen here. No alleluia and no “hope they could believe in.”

In their hearts they doubted the truth of the gospel - that God had become man – that he was led to the slaughter bearing the sins of the world. They doubted when he said he was the bread of life. They doubted when he announced that the temple would be destroyed and he would raise it up in three days – referring to himself. They doubted when he told them that he would be delivered to sinners, crucified, and would rise on the third day. The disciples were all skeptics. Skeptics, I am afraid to say, just like us. They were not spiritual giants who never doubted what Jesus said, but quite the opposite, often questioning and doubting. They would say, “Jesus this is a hard saying who will believe it?!”

They needed some evidence, just as we do. They needed something to touch and hold – needed something to see – something to really sink their teeth into.

I thank the Lord that we have Thomas. A stubborn brute of a disbeliever. Our first skeptic (long before Rene Descartes and Richard Dawkins) – and a much better skeptic, if you ask me!

Thomas blurts out “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe!” Though Thomas is often stigmatized with the nickname “Doubting Thomas,” we secretly love him more than any of the disciples – we relate well to his stubbornness to believe.

Jesus loves the doubters and the skeptics. He loves it when you demand to hear him and see him. He loves it when you seek the truth for He is the truth. And he loves it when you demand from him an answer. He is the answer to all truth.

As the disciples huddled together behind locked doors, one doubting skittish man, next to the other – Christ came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” That locked and bolted door could not stop Christ from entering in and standing among them. Jesus breaks in, resurrected and fresh from the grave. To the shocked disciples he stands as the victor over death and all the powers of darkness. With palms outstretched, he shows them his battle wounds. His hands and feet – and his pierced side.

And he looks at them and loves them. He loves those anxious terrified men, who doubted him, and even denied him, like Peter. Risen from the grave, He does not appear to say “Look what you have done to me!” Or “how dare you doubt me!” He does not say, “Peter, I told you you would!” But rather, Jesus smiles in great love and affection – and says, “Peace be with you!...peace be with you.” He does not accuse them of their weakness to believe – but rather says, “Look what I have done for you!” Come and see!

And loving his Thomas he gave him the grand invitation he had hoped for, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe!”

I like to think that Thomas did just that. With his mouth gaping open in complete awe, he bent over and put his rough calloused finger in the side of Jesus, a side that three days earlier had been pierced by the Roman centurion’s sharp spear. The pierced side that flooded Mt. Calvary by a stream of water and blood. Out of the mouth of doubting Thomas we have the most beautiful and profound Christian confession ever spoken – as great as the sound of all angels in heaven. Having the truth he was searching for, Thomas looked up at his friend, nearly in tears, and said, “My Lord and my God!”

Today the risen Lord comes to you in ways that are even more magnificent than how he came to Thomas on that Easter evening. Where two or three are gathered in His name – He is here. “Peace be with you.” Come and see - taste and eat! Put out your hand. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Blessed are you who doubt. Blessed are you who seek the truth. For the truth of Jesus has found you. Jesus stands among you. He has found you believing perfectly with open ears and an open heart. The truth of Christ enters our locked minds and bolted hearts. He enters our unbelieving hearts. He makes believers of us.

He gives us the power to stay “yes, I believe, help my unbelief.” And help he does. He makes sinners into saints by the word of forgiveness. Turns doubters into confessors and nervous unbelieving disciples into martyrs. He turns doubting Thomas into a Thomas where no doubt can dwell. Thomas believes and we believe. He opens the kingdom to all believers. Peace be with you. Open your hand, come and see, believe he has done all things well for you. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

The alleluia chorus now sounds forth. Jesus is your alleluia. He is your amen. He is the answer to your doubt. For every knee shall bow and every mouth will confess, “My Lord and my God.” In the name of Jesus. Amen+