

Sermon
Easter 2B 2024
John 20:19-31

Today's gospel story spans a week's time. The first half takes place Easter evening. The women (or woman) had gone to the tomb early in the morning only to find it empty. This news spreads throughout the group of disciples and they are now secretly gathered together to talk about what's going on. While gathered together, Jesus miraculously appears and gives them John's version of the Great Commission. But Thomas, who is called "the twin," wasn't with them.

Scripture doesn't say this, but I've always maintained he was down at the bank filling out new signature cards because Judas was obviously no longer the treasurer. Anyway, he wasn't there and he doubts their story, demanding proof of the Resurrection.

A week later, so . . . today . . . Jesus appears again, but this time Thomas is with them. After seeing his wounded hands and side, Thomas utters those famous words, "My Lord and my God."

The first thing I want to say is that Thomas gets a bad rap for this. Throughout the millennia and all over the world he has become known as . . . what? . . . Doubting Thomas; as if that were a bad thing, or as if he was the only one who doubted. But listen to this:

The eleven disciples went to Galilee as Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted – Matthew

Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples, but they would not believe it. He also appeared in another form to two other disciples as they were walking in the country. They went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them – Mark's longer ending

The women told the news to the apostles, but these words seemed to them to be an idle tale and they did not believe them . . . While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering – Luke

The only difference is that Thomas is named. We could easily have had Doubting Peter, Doubting Andrew, Doubting James, or Doubting John. But it's Thomas who has been saddled with that unfortunate nickname.

I say “unfortunate” because people have this idea that doubt is bad, especially when it comes to faith.

Doubt, however, far from being a bad thing allows us to grow. It allows us to explore. It allows us to test. It allows us to question. Thomas’ doubt, his questioning, allowed him to have his own experience of the risen Christ. No amount of prodding or proselytizing from the other disciples was going to convince him otherwise.

This is a lesson for us. When we talk with other people about our faith, we should approach that discussion not with, “I know Jesus and this is what you need to do,” but with, “This is how I experience Jesus, and I invite you to explore how you might experience him.” The first approach assumes you know what’s best for the other person, while the second approach invites them to join you on a journey. And that’s exactly what this is – a journey.

Personal faith is a process, not a one-time event. Faith is a journey with many twists and turns, and ups and downs. Our faith can be challenged by personal events – the unexpected death of a friend or family member, as well as larger events – war, famine, homelessness. Look at Peter who said Jesus was the Messiah, and then denied knowing him. Or any of the other disciples who promised to follow him to the death, but deserted him instead. This is just one of the reasons I dislike the question, “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?” Because it’s simplistic and assumes a one-and-done event.

Personal faith is our response to Divine Truth. Divine Truths are those Truths which we have been gifted by God through the Holy Spirit and Scripture. Things like: God created, the Trinity, God is love, the Resurrection, Holy Communion. These are Truths which have been revealed to us, which we have come to believe are True, and through our faith are acted upon.

Faith, like love, is a verb. Our faith shapes who we are and leads us to particular actions. Our faith leads us to worship God on a regular basis – we don’t just believe in God, we come and worship. Our faith leads us to sacrificial love – we don’t just pray for those in need, we work to alleviate whatever is causing the problem. Our faith allows us to explore the mystery of God. Our faith isn’t about understanding;

it's about being open to mystery and exploration, and finally bringing us to a place where we can, like Thomas, proclaim, "My Lord and my God."

This statement of Thomas' carries more weight than we often think it does. In a time when Caesar was seen to be a type of divinity, in a time when Caesar had ultimate power, Thomas' statement was the ultimate statement of revolution. Only Christ would be worthy of his loyalty. Only Christ would be worthy of his worship. Only Christ would dictate how he would live. Because of his faith, he could do no other.

To whom are we loyal? Who do we worship? Who dictates how we live? If Christ doesn't inform and guide every aspect of our lives, are we really living into our faith?

As we continue to explore what the empty tomb means, don't be afraid of doubts, because those doubts can and should lead you to explore and deepen your faith.

Amen.