

April 11, 2021, Easter 2, John 20:19-31

Over my almost 21 years of ordained ministry, I have preached on this passage from John's gospel numerous times. In fact, even before I was ordained, this was the passage I preached my first real sermon on right here at St. Mark's as a Seminarian 24 years and five days ago today. Over the years I have read some commentaries more than once and added some new ones. I have also read and heard sermons by other preachers on this passage. But it took a while for me to realize why I felt a certain affinity for this passage, even apart from its place as that of my first real sermon.

You see, I have been Thomas! I have been on the fringe of the faith community with one foot in and one foot out, trying to make some sense of what this Jesus stuff was all about. I was raised in the church, my mother took me to Sunday School and VBS, I got involved in Youth Group and was baptized as a teenager, as was common in the church I grew up in. For the next few years, though, my church involvement could be described as sporadic at best.

But there is something about being involved in a Christian community of faith that seems to somehow always stay with you. The seeds may remain dormant, but once planted, they are just waiting to sprout. I remained on the fringe of the church, connected but not involved. I was immersed in the water of my baptism, but as far as real church involvement, I was still standing on the edge of the pool, one foot in, one foot out.

I think many of us share experiences similar to Thomas's; we have some experience with Jesus, but still are not sure of just what role he plays in our life. We want to believe with all our hearts, minds, and strength, but we are looking for something concrete to solidify our faith. And yet, Jesus says we are blessed because we have not seen yet have come to believe, even if our belief is a little shaky at times.

In the midst of our fears, doubts, and questions, Jesus comes to us, not in flesh and blood, but through the work and power of the Holy Spirit, and the care, love, and support of our fellow disciple.

Perhaps you have been, or even are, like Thomas as well, seeking answers, looking for evidence. Jesus came to Thomas at the most critical time of his faith, and if we continue to seek him, he will come to us as well.

Even though Thomas wasn't with the others when Jesus first appeared, he came back. Perhaps more importantly though, when he returned, they welcomed with the good news that they had seen the Lord. But for Thomas, it seemed just too good to be true, thus the moniker, "Doubting Thomas."

Those who were now sharing that good news hadn't exactly been shining examples of unshakeable faith themselves. They had abandoned Jesus when he was most vulnerable, they doubted Mary Magdalene when she said she had seen the Lord, and when Jesus appeared they were hiding in a locked room, afraid they might be next to be executed. Maybe they should have been known as the "Doubting Dozen" in their own response to the events of the day.

When Jesus appears to the fearful flock, he repeats his greeting of peace twice. The first time as if to say, "Do not be afraid, I am here to offer forgiveness and reconciliation, not to exact revenge" and the second time to say, "There is no need to hide, in fact I am sending you out into the world to proclaim the good news of my resurrection."

When they share that good news with Thomas, they get a taste of the challenge that lies ahead, a challenge we modern day disciples still face. Thomas doesn't blindly accept their word, he wants proof. He wants to see what they saw and feel what they felt. He wants to meet the risen Lord himself.

That is the "Doubting Thomas" experience many of us have shared at one time or another. We have heard about Jesus, we have some expectations of Jesus, others have told us about their experience with the risen Lord,

we may even have had some experience in which we felt Jesus' presence ourselves. We believe Jesus exists, but we are not sure of his place in our lives.

Trust me, Jesus knows when we are seeking him. Jesus wasn't present when Thomas expressed his doubts, but when Jesus appeared to Thomas, he offered exactly what Thomas had asked for. Even better than knowing what we want, Jesus knows what we need!

My own experience was not an instant recognition like Thomas's, but over time, as I remained even tangentially involved in the church, the church continued to tell me about the Risen Lord until I, too, could say, "My Lord and my God!"

This passage from John's Gospel is one we hear every year on the Second Sunday of Easter, and for good reason; some things never change! Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of his resurrection in a locked room. He appeared to Thomas a week later in that same room. For 21 centuries he has been appearing when and where he has been needed and sought the most, and he will appear to us when we need him and seek him most.

Christ is risen, he is alive and at work in his body, the church. Do not doubt but believe. Christ is risen indeed, alleluia. Amen.