

This is the second Sunday of the season of Easter. Some years on this day, we've celebrated Holy Hilarity, citing an ancient practice of having a jester enter a cathedral when some God mystery too deep for the human mind to begin to fathom is being preached. Resurrection would and certainly does fit that bill. We liken Jesus' victory over death to the biggest joke on Satan there could ever be.

Today's gospel lesson is set on the evening of the resurrection, and one week later. Those gathered behind locked doors became overjoyed when they saw the risen Lord. For Thomas, who was absent, though, it was no laughing matter. His words expressing his need to also see the Lord, and even touch his wounds, are over interpreted as doubt. Let's call Thomas honest or pragmatic. Let's acknowledge Thomas' grief and yearning for proof before he risks his heart being broken again by dashed hopes if Jesus is not really alive. Most importantly, if we believe, let's wholeheartedly claim Jesus as Lord of our lives as Thomas did.

In reading and re-reading the story, it feels like the other disciples missed the point. Jesus didn't appear to them to brag about beating death, or chastise them for denying or deserting him, or continue as if nothing happened, he came to empower them, and commission them. They didn't get the full impact of his passing of the peace through the breath of the Holy Spirit. They didn't seem to hear the bit about forgiving of sins. They didn't hear they were being sent. The reason I say this is they were still in the same room behind locked doors again a week later.

Thomas is the one who really saw, who really believed first. He cries out, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus states a paradox in response: because you have seen me, you believe, blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed. I have done a lot of thinking about the connection between seeing and believing. I'd like you to do so as well. Do we see Jesus because we believe, or do we believe because we have seen Jesus? Or is it a combination of the two.

I'm thinking this time between resurrection and Pentecost is the time needed for the disciples to grow their belief from a noun to a verb. From head knowledge to actions that reflected the difference having known Jesus made in their lives. Maybe they needed time to remember Jesus' peace greeting, his declaration of sending them, followed immediately by breath, and again immediately by talk of forgiveness. Maybe they needed time to process and connect the dots. Maybe Thomas got it in an instant. He saw, he understood the Lord and he believed.

I really, really, really think this passage is about much more than doubt vs. belief. There are many things we can glean from it: Jesus brings joy in the midst of suffering.

Jesus speaks shockingly into our perceived reality with a new truth.

Jesus drives fear away to make room for equipping us to be sent.

Perhaps part of Jesus' request to be remembered was an emphasis on not feeling shame, regret, or guilt for anything the past.

Our belief is to be more of a verb.

Maybe we keep ourselves locked behind some metaphoric doors, afraid that Jesus will come and breathe his commission onto us.

Jesus is always looking for us in the locked up places of our hearts.

Some wounds will remain. Can we learn from Jesus not to let them define us?

We can celebrate and grieve at the same time-it's ok.

There is a connection between peace and forgiveness. How well do we understand this? Practice this?

The wounds of the world are Jesus' wounds.

Are we wary, envious, skeptical, fearful? Jesus meets us where we are.

John said there were many other things Jesus did that were not recorded, he wrote down enough for us to believe Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing we might have life in his name. If that is the same as praying in his name, it means our hearts and minds are changed to match that of Jesus.

So where does this leave us? Let me read a poem written from Thomas' perspective. I hope you can get its full impact. It's very powerful. This is called What Thomas Wants by Andrew King.

In the days or weeks ahead, you may experience moments of fear, despair, loneliness, boredom. You may get sick. You may suffer a loss. You may just want to see Jesus. Remember Jesus. He is right there with you offering his peace, his breath, his life, speaking his truth into your perceived reality in a most subversive way. May you be courageous enough to breathe deeply of the Spirit. This day and every day, we are an Easter people. Amen.