

Holy Spirit, breathe in us this day, and this hour-- let your live-giving breeze sweep across our lives, giving us new life in the knowledge of the Risen life of your Son. I ask this in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Inspirer. Amen.

*"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

Thomas is our man this morning, as he is every Sunday after Easter. Although the word “doubt” isn’t even mentioned in our passage today, doubting Thomas is still how we know him—its still his call sign, his moniker, his handle.

After the fantastic kickoff party last Saturday night and Sunday morning, we are in the second Sunday of the Easter season, with plenty of reasons for celebration.

I am particularly filled with joy at Ron, Miriam, Karla, and Steve’s decision to be received into our Anglican expression of faith. It was wonderful to journey with them in the Life Community and Faith class, and I am grateful for this opportunity we have to celebrate with them today. We are returning to normal life after Resurrection Sunday, but it is not the old normal. It is a new normal, enriched by the wisdom and new relationships that we have gained in the course of Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

So, in light of all this, I wonder if Thomas has some wisdom to offer us this morning. Can we see him as an investigator Thomas, and not just doubting Thomas? He wants to know if

this Risen Christ is really real—and not some ghostly apparition. Does this Risen Christ have the same body that was pierced in the crucifixion? The crucifixion, after all was not just a flesh wound. If you believe one medical interpretation of both water and blood spilling out of where the spear pierced him, Jesus' pericardium was cut—the pericardium being the pouch of fluid surrounding and protecting the heart. The flesh of Christ's heart was literally broken, sliced open by the disobedience of a world that could not accept his work of reconciliation—or receive his message of redemption, that the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand.

Has this Christ really overcome death, and hell? Is Jesus really be able to sit down and break bread with the disciples? It's easy to question Thomas for desiring certainty when he was so close to the event, but I wonder if we can appreciate some of his gifts, at the same time that we acknowledge his areas for growth.

After all, we don't exactly know why Thomas wasn't gathered that morning with the other disciples. The text tells us that the disciples who gathered had locked the doors behind them, out of fear. Perhaps Thomas was afraid as well—perhaps too afraid to join the others? I've heard it said that the opposite of love isn't hate—it's fear. I will never know for sure—but I think our Gospel describes a time of great fear and uncertainty for the disciples. And, in our story today, Jesus is faithful in showing up, despite the locked doors.

But we are told that Thomas, in hearing the report of Christ's visit to the other disciples, makes a conditional statement—

the variation on the usual “If, Then” logic, phrased in the negative:

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

“Unless..., I will not”-- How many of these kinds of ultimatums have been given to God?

“God, unless you give me this job, I will not believe that you have a good plan for how I can use the gifts you have given me to bless others”

God, unless I or my child goes to this school, I will not trust that I will be able to learn and grow.

God, unless this person recognizes that they have made a mistake, I will not forgive them.

God, unless you give me what I want, I will not give you what you want.

Unless... I will not” is a cousin to an “if then” kind of thinking:

If I lived in this kind of space...

If I had this kind of work...

If my family responded to me in this kind of way...

If my coworkers changed how they do this one thing...

If I was regarded this way...

If I had this amount of money...

Then I could be kinder, happier, more grateful, more hopeful or more wise.

We can construct endless fantasy worlds about what our life or our faith would be like if God would only allow us to do or see or receive this or that particular thing.

But, to investigator Thomas's credit, this is not the whole story of his interaction with Jesus.

Jesus does show up, but it wasn't necessarily in the way that Thomas was expecting, or one could say, demanding.

We are told that the following week Jesus showed Thomas the marks from the wounds on his side and on his hands and invited Thomas to touch his hands and his side, but we aren't told that Thomas actually reached out to put his fingers on the wounds.

The invitation was there, but we aren't told that he accepted it. According to John's Gospel, (the only account we have of this story), Jesus showed him the wounds, and then when Thomas affirmed his faith, Jesus responded:

*"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

Jesus names Thomas's seeing—but he doesn't mention any physical contact—because it was unnecessary!

God shows up in our life, in both power and transformation—but the miracle may not be exactly what we

think or expect. We may have a particular vision for how we want Christ to act in our life, and that may or may not be how the divine economy unfolds. Our spiritual nourishment may not come in the form that we initially think we want or need. We may be asking for silver or gold, and be given spiritual healing. We may ask for answers, and receive companionship.

Like Thomas, sometimes all I need for transformation is a glimpse of truth, a glimpse of God's work of reconciling love, as painful and painstaking as it is at times. I can be nourished with a glimpse of God's justice or God's victory, in a person where God's joy and peace are shining through their life, or in a community that accomplishes something that had previously been thought to be impossible.

Truth can show itself in the beauty of what God has created in us—whether that be in the beauty of our worship, in the beauty of our best effort to be present at work, with family, with friends, or with others in our community of faith.

I think the communal sharing described in Acts is beautiful. Reading it, I find myself impressed, humbled, and also overwhelmed by the faith practices of those who have gone before us. But, I also find a powerful witness in the commitments made in the here and now, most immediately in the Making a Space for All capital campaign. It is a witness for us to share our resources together as we seek to glorify God in this place. The campaign is a reason for great celebration.

And, the early disciples did not just share their resources—they also shared their prayers with one another—just a few verses before, Peter was telling a beggar asking for alms—“I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!” He offered his hand as well as his prayers for the man, and although healing was not what the man had been requesting, or perhaps even expecting, it was certainly something he would have appreciated. God was showing up through Peter, in the power of the name of the Risen Son of God.

Also in Acts, before our reading this morning, we are told that the early disciples worshipped together in the Temple *day by day*, breaking bread together afterwards. Their sharing was not just money, or prayers—they also shared their food, their relationships, and their time—journeying through life as a community unafraid to declare the word of life, and unafraid to confess their mistakes along the way.

Returning to the second time that the disciples gathered in our Gospel today, we hear that the doors were shut, but we don't read that they were locked. The disciples were learning—as Christ's disciples are still learning—to let perfect love cast out fear, and to give witness to the victory of God's covenantal lovingkindness, in the breaking of the bread.

May we continue to join together in the life-giving Way, day by day.

Amen.