

Second Sunday of Easter
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Sunday, April 19, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133
1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you know this gospel is read every year the Sunday after Easter? The exact same text debuting a disciple we have dubbed as Doubting Thomas. Thomas Didymus in Hebrew and Greek means the Twin. Not one of the more well known disciples, Thomas appears only 4 times in the Gospel of John. Yet, he is popular enough to have earned the infamous nickname.

Perhaps we can all remember a time or two when we have been a “Doubting Thomas.” When a young child dies, when cancer strikes, when jobs disappear, when the market falls, when money is tight and we’re not sure how we will pay the bills. Life has its ups and downs to be sure and can be difficult enough perhaps to cause our faith to waver. And yet God reaches out to hold us fast and to help us believe.

When my husband and I face difficult times, there seems to always be a glimmer of hope shining through the fogs of despair. Like the promise of a rainbow, the colors of God’s love shower our lives in various yet often subtle ways. In spite of turmoil, anguish, and pain, I truly believe our experiences have made us better people and has strengthened our faith.

This is how I picture Thomas and his passion for Jesus. His personality will not let him give up on Jesus. Thomas is so much like Peter, speaking out, sometimes blurting (like Peter); not always sure what to make of the situation. Yet, he is not afraid to speak up. His passion is contagious. Remember when Jesus is told that Lazarus is dying?

It is Thomas who in spite of the danger that awaits them in an area where men “had just earlier tried to stone Him (John 11:8), is ready to roll saying, “come let us go that we may die for him.” Thomas later will ask Jesus (John 14:5-6), 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' To which Jesus answers, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

And where is Thomas when the disciples are hiding behind the locked doors fearing for their own lives? I imagine he is out looking for the guys who did this to his Lord and Savior. Or maybe Thomas is too devastated to sit behind the 4 walls. Maybe he'd rather be out doing something. The only thing we know for sure is that the disciples know how to find Thomas and when they do, they tell him the good news over and over again.

In the Greek the verb “see” is in the perfect tense, implying it is a past action with a continuing effect in the present. They **saw** something in the past and that **seeing** continues to affect their lives in the present (Crossmarks.com). And they want Thomas to be a part of that.

Can't you just hear them? “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas, we tell you He is alive!! Really, we mean it. We saw him with our own eyes. We touched the nail holes in his hands, and the piercing in

his side. He was there, honest, we keep telling you so that you too can believe. Thomas may not feel he can succumb to the fallibility of humankind.

What if the disciples are wrong? What if he should get his hopes up only to have them dashed?

Thomas' response "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" *may be* memorable, but I believe they are just a catalyst for what is to follow.

You see, I think the best is yet to come. When Thomas is in the upper room with the other disciples a week later, Jesus appears before them. This time, Thomas is there to see him.

Before he can say anything, however, Jesus greets Thomas inviting him, to put his finger in the mark of the nails his hands; and the wound of Jesus' side. According to the NRSV Jesus tells him, "Do not doubt but believe."

The Greek translation, however, makes it more apparent, reading ..."stop your unbelieving and continue believing."

Rather than waver in our faith and become unbelieving, God wants us to hold fast to our beliefs. When things go badly, when we face hardships and pain, we can remember these words and hold on to hope and continue believing.

This is the kind of hope we see on Easter morning, as Mary Magdalene, Peter and the other disciple go to the tomb. Standing beside the rolled away stone, seeing the linens lying in the empty tomb the disciples believe. Mary Magdalene hearing Jesus speak recognizes his voice and she believes. This kind of hope to which they cling, has strengthened their faith as they continue believing.

There is a theme woven throughout their story and our own stories which points to moments of conviction – this 'aha' moment comes in different ways and at different times for each of us. However, in that same vein, we can also be doubtful. Engrained in the very fabric of our lives, we are sure to go through stages in life when we question God. We may not always see God as an intricate part of our lives especially in the ordinary. We may not always be aware of His presence. But, just as Mary Magdalene, the disciples and all those who witnessed Jesus' resurrection, have their eyes opened and continue to believe, so shall we.

Thomas believes. And this is the best part. Looking closely at the text we see Thomas does not necessarily put his finger in the mark of the nails or put his hand in Jesus' side. Instead Thomas proclaims, "My Lord and my God." His eyes are opened. To me these five words are worth remembering. This is the only place in the Bible where Jesus is proclaimed as God. Thomas has an 'aha' moment. He becomes a "Confessing Thomas."

The ELCA tells us that "Repentance and forgiveness are the open door for the coming of the Spirit. Only if the Spirit is at work within us do we have a hope that will endure." When we recognize our sins, our eyes are opened to the active presence of God among us.

The common thread throughout the generations began when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit unto the disciples. The promise of the rich and everlasting presence of God began in the upper room and continues into our lives.

Our Lord and Savior continues to come to us in midst of our human condition.

Sometimes, God's humility is standing on a street corner in the shape of a homeless man. And then there are times God walks with me in the garden as the colors unfold and the birds awaken with song. I see Jesus in my husband, my children and grandchildren each time they tell me they love me.

I strive to respond in kind, staying close to God through prayer, reading the Bible, and by serving God in the world. Through this I am reminded that Jesus walks beside me, helping me when I get lost or become a "Doubting Thomas."

Our comfort and assurance lies in Jesus' response to Thomas' proclamation, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (John 20:26-29). God's Word is our guide, and our comforter as the Holy Spirit willingly speaks to us every moment of our lives. If we doubt we need only to listen one of the many stories that continue to witness the hand of God reaching down to touch someone's life – stories such as this.

One night, a cabdriver took a fare around 2:30 am at a building which was completely dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once and leave.

But having seen too many impoverished people who depend on taxis as their only means of transportation, the cabdriver waited until something caused him to feel it too dangerous to stay. If feeling safe, he would always go to the door. This passenger might be someone who needs my assistance, he said to himself.

So he walked to the door and knocked. 'Just a minute', answered a frail, elderly voice. He could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80's stood before him.

She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940s movie.

By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets.

There were no clocks on the walls; no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware. 'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she asked. He took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took his arm as they walked slowly toward the curb.

She kept thanking him for his kindness. 'It's nothing', he told her. 'I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated'. 'Oh, you're such a good boy', she said.

When they got in the cab, she gave him an address, and asked, 'Could you drive through downtown?'

'It's not the shortest way,' he answered quickly. 'Oh, I don't mind,' she said 'I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice'.

He looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. 'I don't have any family left,' she continued. 'The doctor says I don't have very long.' He quietly reached over and shut off the meter. 'What route would you like me to take?' he asked. For the next two hours, they drove through the city. She showed him the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.

They drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds.

She had him pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes, she'd ask him to stop in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, 'I'm tired. Let's go now.' They drove in silence to the address she had given him. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as they pulled up.

They were attentive and kind, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her. The taxi driver opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

'How much do I owe you?' she asked, reaching into her purse. 'Nothing,' he said. 'You have to make a living,' she answered. 'There are other passengers,'

And, almost without thinking, he bent and gave her a hug. She held onto him tightly. 'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you.' He squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light. Behind him, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

In a moment we will profess the Nicene Creed which begins, "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen." Still, like Thomas, we will ask for a sign of God's presence in our lives. We often find ourselves frightened like the disciples behind locked doors.

And yet God reaches out to hold us fast and to help us believe. It is through God's presence and everlasting love that Jesus offers us his wounded self in the broken bread and cup of wine transforming into a community of open doors...offering peace, forgiveness, and generosity, helping us find our way in the world and sharing with one another so that no one among us *ever be alone or in need*" Amen.

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