



Second Sunday of Easter (C)

John 20:19-31

April 11, 2010

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+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Doubting Thomas! This famous story comes up year after year with essentially the same core message. That is that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared on Easter evening to the other disciples, so there was doubt in his heart, or at least on the surface, so it would seem.

Doubts. Doubts about faith. Doubts about God's presence and actions in our lives. Do you have them? I certainly do. My Spiritual Director's most used phrase is "Christian, Where is God in the midst of that?" Well, where *is* God in the midst of many things in our lives, the passing away of a loved one, the loss of a friendship because of a misunderstanding, the disappointment of not getting a new position or a promised promotion. These are kinds of things that can shake the core of our relationship with God.

We are here this morning because we believe that we are responding to God's call to be here. We are here because we believe that we need to be here to worship God, to be together and to be strengthened for the journey of life.

We are also here because we believe that God *is* with us and that God *does* listen to our prayers and hears them. But, if you are like I am, I do experience doubt that God listens and hears me that God may or may not act the way I think God should act in my life.

Thomas, the other disciples including Mary Magdalene and the other women must surely have experienced some doubt especially on that Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. If you remember from last week, they all had to be reminded that Jesus said that he would die and rise on the third day, and that he did do just that.

Jesus' appearance to the disciples on that Easter evening was yet another proof that he had kept his promise. Yet, Thomas wasn't there, so he missed seeing Jesus on the night of the Resurrection. Thomas had a week to work on his sense of disappointment and loss, his sense of not being in the loop, his sense of *maybe*, his sense that the trust he had had in Jesus may have been misguided, his sense that he perhaps needed to see in order to fully believe.

Did Thomas really doubt or was his faith in Jesus simply with conditions? There is something within us that if we do this or that, then, we should get this or that back in return. More or less, we are people with an innate sense of bartering. We barter with ourselves, with others and with God even if we don't think we do. At least, I fear that I'm guilty of that.

Oh, it's not conscious because I know better than that. But, there's a part of me that really does think that if I do this or that in my relationship with God, then, I'm *entitled* to my prayers being answered. Can we see that Thomas just might have felt entitled?

After all, Thomas had followed Jesus, had missed meals, had walked thousands of miles around the Palestine countryside following Jesus, listening, watching, being attentive like a good worker bee. So perhaps, Thomas felt that he was entitled to see Jesus. Perhaps, Thomas' sense of entitlement was simply an example of conditional love that he and we experience in our lives.

For my part, Thomas may have had doubts but those doubts were part of the conditions of his love for Jesus. I have to tell you that I believe that most of us do the same, whether we are conscious of it or not. We bargain with God in our prayer. We establish conditions even though we know that that's not how a relationship with God works. God works according to God's timetable not ours.

I believe that what we often think we need is perhaps not what God thinks we need. Even in sickness, loss, sadness, disappointments or death, what God offers us is beyond the things of this life. God offers us an inner *peace* in knowing that there is something more, something more to this life that we can reach out and touch.

Paul tells us in Philippians, that the "love of God which surpasses all understanding" will guard our "hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:7) God doesn't promise us good health, wealth, happiness, great jobs, successful marriages or 401k's, or even attentive children. Just because we believe in God, worship, pray and ask for forgiveness, doesn't entitle us to an experience God in ways that *we* think we should experience God. That's just frustrating, isn't it?

Last week on a glorious warm and sunny day, the Church celebrated Eucharist in grand style as it does year after year, and it was a glorious Easter Day. Today, we're more or less back to the routine of Sunday morning worship.

My hope and prayer is that we are all the better for it. We're here because we want to continue to experience Easter Joy, Easter Peace, Easter Resurrection, Easter intimacy with God through Jesus. I believe Thomas wanted that. Thomas longed for that. Thomas just needed a little push, and he was there.

You and I need little 'pushes' from time to time. We need to know that God is with us, for us, within us, not far away but deep down within our hearts in good times and in bad. Our faith tradition assures us that even in the *worst* of times, God is with us. God is in the midst of every situation and is there for us even when we can't feel God's presence. Do we believe that? If we do, then, we are truly blessed and are called to bring that blessing to others in our lives.

As corny as it may sound, we are *Easter People!* We are people who have been blessed by the Resurrection of Jesus and his life-giving Spirit, which he imparts on those who believe, and we are forever changed!

Christ is risen and reigns in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have the assurance of peace, the peace which indeed surpasses all our understanding in all situations of life. Christ is with us, within us, beside us and before us, and of that, we can be sure. Amen!