

Sermon Easter 2 Year B April 8, 2018

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Scripture, and the understanding of it, has come down to us over the years recorded by humans and touched by their ideas and prejudices. For instance, Mary Magdalene's identity was merged with the prostitutes by a pope who thought there were far too many Mary's to deal with in scripture. And, as many of you have heard me say before, I believe Thomas, formerly known as the Twin, has gotten a bad rap over history from some one person's decision to use the adjective doubting, which then went viral. Remember the one who transcribed this memory had been a doubter too!

Thomas was the one who had been eager to go with Jesus and face death, Thomas was the one who asked questions to understand more fully what Jesus was telling them, Thomas was the one who was NOT hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. And Thomas was not alone in his incredulity, none of the other guys believed that Mary and the others had seen Jesus until they in fact had seen Jesus in person as well. Yet for centuries Thomas has borne the label of doubter. And with that label, reinforced the idea that questioning and doubting are in the category of not quite acceptable activities.

Yet, Jesus didn't say 'you won't be blessed if you have doubted', didn't say 'you won't be blessed if you have questioned'. Jesus **did** say that he came before them so that they might witness and pay forward the experience of being with him in person, and that in the days to come those who come to belief without seeing him in the flesh would be blessed'. He knew the world needed witness to his messages and he made sure that they would have it.

As the early church moved forward, we know that Thomas was not ostracized from the group, as the previous doubters had not been. For if doubt had been a disqualifier none of them would have been left to be the new community that would follow and share Jesus teachings.

Thomas and the Mary's and all those guys locked up in that little room were all called to witness in their lives, the truth they had experienced in Jesus person. They were called to make real what he said and did over and over again so others could have the same experience through them.

When we think of witness in a Christian context we tend to immediately go to that discomfiting image of a pious evangelical on a street corner shouting that Jesus saves. Yet, in all rationality we know that witness means to experience or see an event, to support a claim, to give understanding, to bring reality into sight. And these folks, the friends and followers of Jesus, went on to witness with their lives.

Our reading from Acts tells us that they made a good start - at least some of them. They were of one heart and soul and none were needy.

But as it happens, the expected end time was not soon, or even a few decades away.

The lessons and hopes and ways of being that seemed possible in the immediate aftermath and the years following the Resurrection that still had tangible connections to the living Jesus had become hardened in some ways, and abandoned in others.

There are many times in Christian history that we have reason to regret and repent for the actions of those who have gone before us.

Each time we believed we had reached a new and enlightened place that promised peace another evil would appear to draw us back again into battle.

Till we reach today, and find people claiming to be followers of Christ not questioning and interpreting scripture to broaden understanding and the reach of the faith to the many, but blatantly contradicting Jesus' words and example as they have come down to us and denying the call of Christ to live in the active practice and witness of our belief.

As human beings our lives depend on learning from one another what is safe, and what is not, what is true, and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not... as we listen to what we are told and challenge it, we learn the hard lessons about gravity from stairs, and what hot means from open flames, we make the lessons handed down to us part of ourselves .

And while gravity and heat have remained consistent over time everyone one of those categories have elements within them that have changed. We no longer believe that tomatoes are universally poisonous, that flight is not possible, and that exposing a woman's ankles is the height of immorality. We learn to listen and test and experience to know more fully the truth.

Yet we are at a time and place in our country where even seeing is not believing, where reality and truth are considered intangibles to be bent in whatever way is beneficial to the holder. A time when to question is once again a dangerous deed, and to doubt is a risk. Many of you have seen the recent news reports of the marked changes in people's perception of lying. Many more today finding lying perfectly acceptable if they believe it is to their own benefit.

Each Easter we are reminded once again to work toward our witness and our call to stand with Christ, for the people of God's creation, digging deeper into our belief to find a firm footing, and exposing our own wounds to the light of Christ that we may heal and move forward. I have told you in the past about the sign on my door when I was a college chaplain, If you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence against you? a corollary to that might be, if they were looking for witnesses to Christ, would they think of you?

So on this quiet, low Sunday after the eggs have, hopefully, all been found and the last of the ham has made its way into the soup pot, I invite you to reflect on the questions that Thomas and so many others asked as they tried their best to understand, follow and witness to our Lord in their own day. Explore your own doubts and honor your own questions so that you may go deeper into the truth.

What does it mean to you to be a believer? For some people their witness is part of their census data; a simple proposition, a statement that fits in with your particulars, of height, weight, hair color and marital status.

For others it is a straightforward assent to the creed, kind of like the Pledge of Allegiance. As you proclaim the creed today, listen for where it catches you out in question or support.

How does your belief go deeper and hook the real you at your core, where your hopes AND your wounds lie? Witness comes out of a gut understanding and experience of reality. As we make our confession can you try and bring an actual wound or sorrow to offer to Jesus?

As you reflect on the details of your own life and practice of belief remember that Jesus forgave, and tried again, and re-explained, the whole time he was present to the disciples both before and after the resurrection. You don't have to get it right once and for all, and truly none of us will till the end when Jesus will make it right with us.

Jesus is available for you as he was to the disciples, if you bring your belief and your questions and your doubts with you when you meet, and allow them to be transformed into something new that will naturally become the witness of the resurrection life you are called to live.

AMEN