

Easter 2B
April 11, 2021
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL

Acts 4:32-35
Psalm 113
I Jn 1:1 – 2:2
John 20:19-31

Grace to you and peace from God and for our Risen Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Before we even begin digging into today's Gospel, there's something I want to bring to your attention. Every Christmas Eve we hear the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke. Every Easter, we hear the story of the resurrection of Jesus from one of the Gospels. Every Pentecost we hear the story of the Holy Spirit coming as it is recorded in Acts. Every year when we observe the Baptism of Jesus, we hear that story as it is recorded in Matthew or Mark or Luke. These are important stories integral to our Christian faith.

And, interestingly, every year on the second Sunday of Easter, the Christian Church hears the story we just heard – the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples and then to Thomas. What is it about this story that is so important that the framers of the lectionary deemed it necessary that we hear it every year? Please hold that thought.

Now, I'd like to engage in a little bit of free association. When I say something, please shout out the first word that comes to your mind. Spring... Home... Breakfast...
Easter... Doubting...

In response to Spring, I heard "flowers," "cleaning," "training," and "fall," and "break" among others. In response to Home, I heard "house," "run," "family," and I think I even heard "mortgage." After Breakfast, some said, "eggs," and others "cereal," and still others "lunch." In response to Easter, I heard "bunny," "eggs," "basket," and "Jesus," because, well, Jesus is almost always the right answer. And in response to Doubting, I heard only one response and that is "Thomas."

A friend of mine observed that we don't call Peter "Denying Peter" even though he did it three times in the course of a few hours. And we don't call Paul "Persecutor Paul" even though that was his claim to fame for a good while. Yet because of one sentence hastily blurted out, Thomas was doomed to be known as "Doubting Thomas."

So, today I want to tell you three things about Thomas and the text.

First, about the text – the Greek word "doubt" never appears in this text. Jesus' words are better translated – "do not be unbelieving but instead believe." You may well ask – what difference does this make?

Two learned New Testament scholars, one Lutheran and one not, were having a conversation about whether people who had doubt could worship. The one not Lutheran said that certainly they couldn't – it's like an oxymoron. If one worships, then by definition they do not doubt. And the Lutheran scholar said, "Come to the Lutheran church – we do it all the time!"

In fact, I have yet to doubt something that I didn't believe to be true. If I don't believe it – there is no reason for me to doubt it. Instead, I simply dismiss it. Doubt is a companion of belief at various times in the life of the Christian. If you have doubts, do not worry. This Gospel story is

not about “don’t doubt.” It is about believing in something THROUGH our doubts. If you can’t bring your questions and wondering and even doubts to church where can you bring them?

The second thing about Thomas – this one I don’t really know how to tackle exactly. I think he may have been at a crisis of faith and belief. He wasn’t with the other followers when Jesus came to them a week earlier. They had seen him and kept telling him over and over about Jesus’ resurrection. But he was clear – unless I see and touch him, I will not believe. This was not mere doubt that Thomas was grappling with – it was a matter of belief or no belief. Serious stuff. And so for us, crises in our faith may come. It’s okay.

Third about Thomas – and this is very important – where did he go when he was confused and puzzled and not-believing? He came to the community of faith! He came to those he had walked with and lived with. He came to those who continued to come together. He came to those to whom Jesus came time after time after time.

So, what is it about this story that makes it so important for us to hear each and every year. And perhaps in between in our devotional reading. I believe that it is this – having questions and wonderings and doubts does not put you outside the Christian faith, does not condemn you, does not separate you from the church. Keep coming back because Jesus persistently shows up.

And that’s the other very important thing about today’s Gospel -- Thomas said, “Unless I see the marks on his hands and touch the mark of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe!”

So, what did Jesus do? He came to the followers again, came over to Thomas and said – go ahead, touch me, see the wounds. Do not be unbelieving but instead believe. He didn’t scold Thomas, he didn’t say, “oK, all RIGHT, if you MUST – here’s the PROOF.” Instead, Jesus, as the grace filled one that he is came to Thomas and offered up to Thomas what Thomas needed to see and to touch so that he could continue to believe. Indeed offered up to Thomas what the others had already experienced. And Thomas, then exclaimed, “My Lord and my God. You Jesus, here in a way I cannot understand, you are the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Wouldn’t it be great if Jesus could come to us now the way that he did to Thomas and the other followers? Maybe then we could be convinced. Maybe then we could comprehend. Maybe then we could believe. Maybe then the incomprehensible could be explained.

Yet Friends, be willing to rest into the incomprehensible, the mystery of our faith. Be willing to see the mystery played out in our daily lives.

And continue to come together here with the community of faith of Grace even if digitally or online. Come especially with your questions, your wonderings, your doubt. Come to worship, to pray, to encourage. Come to be reminded that we are the baptized children of God. Come and be like Thomas

See, touch and believe.

May it be so. Amen.