

Sermon – April 16 2023 St. Thomas our Patron Saint – a disciple who followed Jesus.

The texts for this sermon are posted below the sermon with some of my fun highlights.

You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your hand are pleasures for evermore. Psalm 16

God shows us the path of life. God leads us and walks with us. Being with God – in God's presence we have fullness of joy. This, my friends, is Easter!

Pre-Easter, the disciples follow Jesus on the path of life and there was joy and pleasures. But the path seemed to end at his death. And the joy and peace ended too.

Jesus then appears to his followers, all except Thomas, and they were astonished! We read, "Then the disciples rejoiced" they were filled again with joy at being in his presence. They were not only filled with joy – Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" – they were filled with the Spirit and sent out to do the reconciling work of Jesus.

But not so for Thomas, our Patron Saint here at St. Thomas Chilliwack. Thomas wants his own experience with this risen Jesus. He is a bit cranky and says he won't believe this is true until he sees and touches Jesus himself. He then gets the notorious title "Doubting Thomas."

Was Thomas wrong in his desire to behold and touch his risen friend? Is it bad to not believe everything you hear right up front but to want your own experience of faith?

I think Thomas actually encourages us to have curiosity – to question things – to wonder – to even doubt. For the fruit of Thomas's "doubting" and wanting to know and experience Jesus for himself led to an astonishing encounter that involved a locked door.

Let us remember that this is the Thomas who seems to know that Jesus who was going to raise Lazarus, was also himself going to die in Jerusalem. Thomas invited all of Jesus' disciples to follow Jesus that they might also die with him. He was not faint of heart. He had some fire in his belly!

I wonder if, this morning, we can be encouraged to be like Thomas – to not believe blindly or naively. Asking to see more brings clarity on what I need to know, and it strengthens what I already know.

Thomas is acknowledging his own longing to know that Christ is risen indeed.

Last week we read of Mary lingering at Jesus' tomb in the garden. She was wondering what happened, she was curious and looks into the tomb, she stays with her sorrow, pauses in her fear and anxiety, and is met with Christ who calls her name. And this week Thomas joins her as he, too, wonders, doubts, and waits for his own encounter with the living God. Mary declares, "**I saw the Lord,**" the disciples declared, "**We have seen the Lord,**" and Thomas declares, "**My Lord and my God!**"

They recognize and testify to Christ's presence with them.

Jesus met their longings to connect with him. May Jesus meet us in our desires for he is All-merciful and desires for us to live freely.

Jesus said to Thomas – "You have believed because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Jesus is not saying it is wrong to ask to see – nor is it worse or better to see and believe. He is only saying that 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe' – which is basically all of us and the rest of the world for centuries who do not see Jesus the way the disciples see him – in the flesh and in his resurrected body. **Blessed are all who trust in the Lord.**

Now, if Thomas made his believing *conditional upon seeing* – this is problematic in the life of faith for we are called to walk by faith. We are given graces along the way, "seeings", which confirms our faith. Much in the area of faith is mystery and loving trust and **apparently God even comes through closed and locked doors.**

Perhaps our minds or hearts seem shut like that door at times. Thomas shows us to ask to see and to challenge the status quo. For God comes when the time is right according to God's holy and highest good for all. Jesus is not a visual experience – but a personal knowing however he enters the door of your heart.

Today, I invite us to practice this wondering, waiting and watching that Mary & Thomas model for us. To be curious, to wrestle, even doubt some things,

To practice waiting and listening on God I invite us to do a Lectio Divina – Lectio means READING and Divina means DIVINE – So we will do a Divine Reading together of part of Psalm 16.

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola – a Spanish Jesuit priest and theologian who lived in the 15th century.

This prayer practice offers us intentional time in God’s presence

You will see the asterisk at the end of each line. You may have noticed this in the Psalms before.

*The asterisks mean pause – this is a place to linger a moment and be tuned in to what is being said, or prayed, or complained, or longed for, or to notice what is happening within ourselves ... Let’s notice the *’s and intentionally pause for 2 seconds.

- We will read this passage 2 x – usually we do it 4 x in a Lectio, but to honor our time, and we already read it together once in the readings, we will do 2.
- After both readings we will pause to wonder, to be curious, of what is meaningful in some way.
- Then I will invite you to share a word or phrase if it comes to you with your neighbor. JUST share the word or phrase. We can chat more about what you noticed after the service over a cup of coffee/tea.

I will do the **1st reading** – let us notice what word, or phrase, or image stands out for us - **what is a message or ‘word of life’** that is shimmering to you today – then you can wonder why you may have needed to see that today – and in this way we meet God in the lingering in an intimate and practical way.

Let’s read together the **2nd reading** – **notice an invitation** in this text and what you are being invited to on your faith journey.

Lectio Divina – Psalm 16: 5 – 11

5 O Lord, you are my portion and my cup; *
it is you who uphold my lot.

6 My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; *
indeed, I have a goodly heritage.

7 I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel; *
 my heart teaches me, night after night.
 8 I have set the Lord always before me; *
 because you are at my side I shall not fall.
 9 My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; *
 my body also shall rest in hope.
 10 For you will not abandon me to the grave, *
 nor let your holy one see the Pit.
 11 You will show me the path of life; *
 in your presence there is fullness of joy,
 and in your hand are pleasures for evermore.

May we at St. Thomas follow our patron saint as we long for, and receive, God's presence and are filled with joy and pleasures forever more – for God always comes – like Spring – sometimes she comes late, or early, but she comes – she always does.

First Reading ACTS 2:14A, 22-32 *Peter speaks of Christ's death and resurrection*

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know - this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. **But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord** always before me, for he is at my right hand so that **I will not be shaken;** therefore **my heart was glad,** and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in **hope.** For **you will not abandon my soul** to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; **you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'** Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' **This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.'**"

Psalm 16 *Song of Trust and Security in God*

Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you; *
I have said to the Lord,

“You are my Lord, my good above all other.”

2 All my delight is upon the godly that are in the land, *
upon those who are noble among the people.

3 But those who run after other gods *
shall have their troubles multiplied.

4 Their libations of blood I will not offer, *
nor take the names of their gods upon my lips.

5 O Lord, you are my portion and my cup; *
it is you who uphold my lot.

6 My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; *
indeed, I have a goodly heritage.

7 I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel; *
my heart teaches me, night after night.

8 I have set the Lord always before me; *
because you are at my side I shall not fall.

9 My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; *
my body also shall rest in hope.

10 For you will not abandon me to the grave, *
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11 You will show me the path of life; *
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
and in your hand are pleasures for evermore.

Second Reading 1 PETER 1:3-9 *A Living Hope*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Gospel

THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JOHN

JOHN 20:19-31 *Jesus Appears to the Disciples and Thomas*

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and

said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "**We have seen the Lord.**" But he said to them, "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." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.**" Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' Acts Peter