

Sermon for Easter 2B
Sunday, April 16, 2023
“Thomas, the proclaimer”

Text: John 20:19-31

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Sundays of Eastertide, the proclamation by Mary Magdalene is the underlying theme of all of the stories that we hear in the Gospel lessons. “I have seen the Lord.” The 2nd Sunday of Easter is commonly known as “Low Sunday” because of the relatively low attendance compared to Easter Sunday. It is also known as “Doubting Thomas Sunday,” because the gospel reading every year retells the post-Resurrection event when Jesus appeared to his disciples twice, first in the evening on the day of the Resurrection, but for some reason Thomas wasn’t there. So Jesus appeared to them again a week later, then confronted by a curious, but skeptical Thomas. Throughout the centuries, he has been labeled “Doubting Thomas.”

In everyday conversation being called a “doubting Thomas” is not a compliment; this is a label that we use to refer to somebody who is a skeptic, but not in a good way. Thomas was likely the kind of person whose outlook on life is that the glass is half-empty, rather than half-full. If you remember the story of the raising of Lazarus when Jesus wanted to go to Bethany, it was Thomas who begrudgingly said that they would be going there at their own risk to die with Jesus. Thomas was one of those folks who saw the dark part of the cloud with the silver lining. But, what I *like* about Thomas in today’s story is that he is like the rest of us. He wanted proof. He wanted to see Jesus for himself. Thomas was a guy we can all relate to. He feared the unknown. He was uncomfortable with uncertainty. Thomas clung to the sure thing. Thomas is the kind of guy we can all relate to, because he admitted his reservations, he admitted his uncertainty, but in the end, he came out with the strongest faith and was the first to proclaim Jesus as both Lord and God. He recognized Jesus as the second person of the triune God who had become incarnate in the person of Jesus the Christ. Thomas wasn’t a doubter; he was a proclaimer, but he needed a personal encounter with Jesus first. And, when he experienced Jesus, he saw Jesus for who he was and he proclaimed that experience to his fellow apostles and the world.

Thomas reminds us that it’s ok to doubt. Thomas helps us avoid having blind faith. We naturally have doubts; we ask questions about why things are. Humans have been curious from the very beginning; Adam and Even were curious about what would really happen if they ate the forbidden fruit. It is in our nature to ask questions. We live in a world that expects evidence for everything. The search for evidence affects us every day in some way in our life. And that’s not a bad thing. We need to ask questions and test the boundaries of the way things are or seem to be. We wouldn’t be human if we didn’t wonder and ask why or how. Thomas dared to ask the question that the other disciples were probably too afraid to ask. They had locked themselves in a room in a house. The disciples locked themselves in a room for fear of the religious and civil

authorities. Just a couple days after they saw Jesus crucified, they thought all was lost; they thought that the message of Jesus of Nazareth was dead. They worried that they might be next to hang from a cross. They probably questioned if he really was the Messiah after all. According to John's account, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the disciple whom Jesus loved (we presume that to be John himself) saw the empty tomb. But, did you ever wonder what the other disciples thought when they heard Mary Magdalene exclaim, "I have seen the Lord!"? They probably wanted some kind of proof too; they wanted hard evidence to prove that the news was not just hearsay. But, it was Thomas who named it; he named their disbelief at the incredible, and said, "I need to see for myself." Jesus came through by appearing to them twice—the second time so Thomas would see and believe.

I'm not so sure I would believe if I hadn't had doubt on occasion or longed for evidence for myself. I think we are all in that situation. We're all Thomases sometimes. One of the challenges I find both as a longtime practicing Christian and as a proclaimer of the Word, is trying to talk to people who don't believe in God or Christ, or who don't think that church is important. I can talk somebody else until I'm blue in the face, but they're not really going to believe, they're not even going to get what I'm talking about until they actually experience God in Christ for themselves. That is critical. Unless you have a personal encounter with God, unless you go through something where you experience the risen Christ, it's hard to believe anything about him. Unless you've seen and touched his wounds for yourself, you may go on wondering. I believe, because I have had a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ. That's why I'm here. I imagine that we all believe, because we have had a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ in some profound way. I've studied science and I love learning about the wonders of biology and the universe. I can't tell you how many times God's existence has been reinforced for me in the discoveries of science. I've had low points in my life. I've had moments when the thought has crossed my mind, "Is God gonna come through this time?" or "Where is God in this?" I've seen tragedy, misery, despair in my life and in the world, but somehow God's presence shines forth in the resilience, endurance, and ability of people to overcome tragedy, survive, and move on. I've had my skeptical, Thomas moments on occasion, but then something miraculously fell into place. When I saw one door close, another door I wasn't expecting opened up. When things didn't go the way I wanted them to or a situation didn't turn out like I expected, I eventually discovered how much better off I was because what I wanted didn't happen. But, every time I expected God to be there for me, and even moreso when I wasn't really sure if he was there, God always showed up. Whether we expect him to or not, God always shows up.

It's good for us to be like Thomas, sometimes, in order to strengthen our faith; otherwise, we'd be blind followers. Blind faith can make us complacent to the point where we might miss seeing God's blessing. A little doubt keeps us on the lookout, keeps us yearning for God to move.

Thanks be to God that our catholic—universal—faith constantly reminds us that God is indeed with us. We get to touch and taste the risen Christ physically in the sacrament of his Body and Blood at the Eucharist. We get a personal encounter with him. Our liturgical life, the beauty of the mass and the magnificence of the objects around us in here are meant to give us all a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ. We get to touch and taste the risen Christ physically in the sacrament of his Body and Blood at the Eucharist, which should help us see God better as we go about our business in the world.

Thomas needed to see and touch the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. Touch his wounds when you have been a skeptic, like Thomas. Touch his wounds when you need God to break into your life, come in your midst, and lift your broken spirit. Somebody here today may still be waiting for an encounter with God. Pray to touch his wounds; ask him to prove that he is really in your life and in the world. Then you, too, will be able to say, like Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” Those are the very words we say when the Blessed Sacrament is held up high during the Eucharistic Prayer. We can all touch his wounds and proclaim the Easter message: “I have seen the Lord!” Amen.

Resources

David Lose, “Blessed Doubt,” <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/03/easter-2-c-blessed-doubt/>