

Psalm 150

John 20:19-31

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway

April 24, 2022

## Thomas

I began my professional career as an associate pastor on staff at Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church, over 38 years ago now! Later, after pausing my career when my husband Dave's and my daughters were young, I resumed working in a congregation once again, but in a very part time way. In both of these situations I often found myself preaching on the Sunday following Easter.

This Sunday, officially called the second Sunday of Easter, has gained the informal title of 'low Sunday'. In the rhythm of our life together, after all the emotional, spiritual and physical energy and focus of Lent and Easter, this day can feel a bit like the calm after the storm. The musicians, the worship committee members, the pastors take a breath, or maybe a well deserved vacation and this Sunday is generally a much quieter day in our community of faith life together. I was thinking this week that this is probably for the best. It allows us some time and space for the Easter message to soak in, to permeate our lives once again. Here at Stone this year it is rather a short breather, with all the excitement and working going into the anniversary celebrations next year, but still. : )

Through the years, I have come to look forward to this Sunday though, partly I am sure because the quiet, reflective time sounds good after Holy Week. But I think another reason I like this Sunday so much is that we get to spend some time with Thomas - Thomas, the faithful doubter.

We know this Thomas best as 'doubting Thomas', the disciple who, when told of the risen Christ, said, "I need proof." We never hear if maybe some of the other disciples might have made a similar demand. According to John's gospel from which we read this morning, the other disciples did not have long to wait for *their* proof.

According to John, for the rest of the disciples it was a week earlier, the evening of the very same day Mary Magdalene had come to them with her incredible

announcement that she had *met* the risen Lord. It was then that they, huddled together behind locked doors, fearful and wondering what to do next, had seen Jesus themselves. And at that time he had freely showed them his hands and his side and met their fear and their questions with the gift of his peace and the breath of the Holy Spirit.

But for Thomas it was different. A week had passed. He has *heard it* with his ears but it had not made its way to his heart. In this disciple, Thomas, we get to meet one for whom struggle and doubt **and faith** somehow all come together in this one child of God. The story of Thomas speaks to all of us who come to faith, and continue in faith, with perseverance and with struggle.

We too were not there on that first Easter day. We, like Thomas, come late. The week after Easter has turned into 2000 years for us, and so it is different for us, as it was for Thomas. As we journey in our lives, we too, often search for assurances, some basis for our faith and our hope. It's human nature. The human mind *does* search for order, to make sense of things, to understand the world, to organize the data that comes into our awareness.

Thomas represents all of this for us. The resurrection of Christ makes no sense in terms of what our normal instincts tell us. And so we search. The appearance of articles that often come out in the popular press around Easter each year, talking about the most recent research on the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, attest to the fact that we are still working to make sense of it all.

This is why I so appreciate this story in John and the fact that we get to revisit it each year on the Sunday after Easter. For me this story says, 'it's ok'. All the searching and the questions, they are ok.

Notice, in this story Jesus gives Thomas what he asks for. He comes to Thomas and shows him his hands and his side. Jesus was, and still is, in the business of meeting people where they are.<sup>1</sup>

It does not say here whether Thomas actually ever did touch Jesus. Did he put his finger in wounds in Jesus' hand or reach out his own hand and put in Jesus' side, as Jesus invited him to do? Or was it something else about that moment that caused

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 2, pg. 396, Martin Copenhaver

Thomas to say, “My Lord and my God!”<sup>2</sup> The story leaves room for us to imagine, and room for us to put our selves in Thomas’ place.

Here today, 2000 years later this story reminds us that it is ok to ask the questions, to have the doubts, and the risen Lord will still meet us where we are. Some how, some way Jesus met Thomas where he was that night and Thomas believed. Suddenly Thomas believed and knew in his heart that the risen Christ, Emmanuel, God With Us, was alive and present in his world. Life. Transformation. Easter Good News.

Yes, in this story Jesus does say, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Is Jesus chiding Thomas a bit here? Maybe. But I don’t think that is John’s real point here. This story was written, remember, for early Christians and for all the rest of us who come late. For all of us who did not see the holes in his hands, and yet we still believe. I think this is not so much a chiding of Thomas as it is a blessing, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” a blessing for us, and a reminder that we come to faith each on our own journey.

Maybe some of us do have a story like Thomas’ in our lives. A story when there was indeed a moment, when *before* that moment we were doubting, seeking, searching for something that would help us to know for sure... and then something happened, Christ came to us in some event, some person, and we believed. We just believed.

For others of us it was not, or is not like that at all. The doubting, the seeking the searching *and* the believing all seem to be mixed up in one, often very murky pot, and searching and believing will forever be like two sides to one coin for us.

And this Sunday after Easter, that’s ok.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church this day is often referred to as St. Thomas Sunday. The Eastern Orthodox tradition credits Thomas with taking the gospel to India in the first century.

Thomas, the doubter, is also Thomas, the one who boldly confesses, “my Lord and my God!” and, tradition would have it, one for whom that confession changed his life. Funny how all of that can be one in the same person.

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<sup>2</sup> *Christian Century*, Reflections on the Lectionary. Kenneth Carter, Jr.

Jesus meets us where we are. The story of Thomas reminds us that the good news of Easter, that God who comes to us, abides with us and surrounds us with the Holy Spirit, comes to us in different ways. At different times. And that is ok.

On this Sunday after Easter, as we continue on in our faith journeys, wherever they may take us, may we remember Thomas, and Jesus, who met Thomas, and meets us where we are.