

Time In Between

Text: Acts 2:14, 22-32

1Peter 1:3-9 (Series A, 2nd Sunday in Easter) Ps.16

John 20:19-31

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Let us pray:

The Apostle Thomas, getting all the blame for his disbelief until his eyes beheld the Risen Lord and touched his wounds. Thousands of years later he has become a label - "*a Doubting Thomas*"- for those who don't believe something without concrete proof. And yet, he was far from alone in his doubt.

The other Gospel accounts all tell of the other disciples doubting. Luke 23:11 tells of the disciples dismissing the women's account as an *idle tale* and in Mark 16:11, when Mary Magdalene tells them she had seen the risen Jesus, *they would not believe*.

My personal favorite is in *Matthew 28:17* in defense of Thomas - that says even *when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted*. If you are or ever have been unsure or questioning of this preeminent event in the life of Christ, the Gospel accounts and the whole of Christian theology and practice, you are in good company!

Thomas doesn't want wishful thinking; he doesn't want to believe something that will turn out to be just the imagination of some over-stressed friends. "*Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe*". Thomas said.

Thomas doesn't dismiss the possibility that the disciples had seen Jesus. He could have said, "You're all mad. I don't want to hear another word of this nonsense."

Thomas wants to be convinced. He wants proof that what the disciples had witnessed was true and real and not just some trick. There are times when our faith in God is strengthened and we become convinced more than ever before of God's presence because we have seen and experienced the hand of God at work in our lives.

Perhaps you have had a prayer answered in an amazing way. Or you have experienced a healing – someone had a wonderful recovery from a serious illness that could have taken his/her life.

A family member or a friend whom you have encouraged in their Christian faith suddenly opens their heart to the saving news of the gospel accepts Jesus Christ, and become involved in the church. Some of you have had amazing experiences of the closeness of God at a time when you were feeling lonely, or sick, or grieving.

Yet the story of Thomas, and the other disciples' initial disbelief, humanizes these men and brings them into this current time, as did Peter's denial of Jesus, and even Judas' betrayal and subsequent angst and suicide.

We know these people in our own lives, we are some of them when we struggle to accept and understand all that we are told in the Scriptures and by those who have taught us from the pulpit or in our families.

If we aren't questioning the tenets of our faith at various times, then, for me, it seems we don't really know what we believe or why. These Gospel moments allow us to be who we are and relate to the people who were with Jesus and still wondered what this movement was all about even as they moved forward with him and, very likely, even after him.

Whatever I believe about the Resurrection and its significance to my Christian faith, in moments of wavering I think on the message of David that Peter quotes in the Acts reading and that is paired with the appointed Psalm for this day. It is the crux of the message of, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah - *I must keep the Lord before me, live in hope, and follow the path of faith and life he has shown me.*

On April 7, 2000 my niece, Ellen was tragically killed by a motor vehicle in Regina, Saskatchewan. She was only nine years old when her life was snuffed out.

This accident caused us to wonder, even doubt, whether God knows us at all and if God is all that powerful! We all struggle to find the meaning when a child, who is just starting out in life, meets a tragic death.

We all struggle to find the love of God, when we lose our jobs; when we are broke; when a marriage breaks up, a rebellious child causes parents terrible stress. How many people have prayed for healing but nothing happens. Thomas had experienced Jesus' **crucifixion, death** and **burial**; he had become confused about who Jesus was.

Like any of us in the face of a senseless tragedy Thomas' experience of the closeness of God was at an all time low. Like any of us, most likely he too was asking where was God when all this was happening. Even when the disciples told him the Jesus had risen from the dead, he still would not believe until he had experienced this for himself.

God doesn't scorn or make fun of our wanting to experience first hand the resurrected Jesus. He invites Thomas, and he invites every one of us this morning: *"Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"*

Jesus goes out of his way for this one man and lets him experience the resurrection first hand. Jesus provides this experience to reassure the troubled and doubting Thomas and the disciples that He is alive. Thomas believes and exclaims, *"My Lord and my God!"*

This incident tells us clearly that seeing, touching, experiencing God in dramatic ways *strengthens* our faith, *confirms* our understanding of God, *reassures* us of the power and love of God but *is not the basis of our faith*. If our faith in God rested only on our experiences then our faith would be up and down every day, depending on whether our experiences or circumstances were good or bad.

If we depended on our circumstances, and experiences of God to prove his love for us, then what would we do when the only evidence we see is *sadness, tragedy misery, suffering, and death*. Faith that is Not tested can not be trusted.

You see my beloved friends, there comes a time when we have faith in God in spite of the circumstances we are experiencing. Even when there is no immediate proof from our experience that God is powerful, in control, and that he loves us, we should continue to trust in him.

We believe even though we can't see it. It is Faith that keeps on trusting in spite of the fact that we can no longer see God's hand at work. The book of Hebrews states: "*For without faith it is impossible to please God. He/she that comes to God must believe that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*"

- ❖ In spite of the being jailed and his life threatened, Paul continued to trust God.
- ❖ In spite of being imprisoned in 1943 for his political and Christian opposition to the Nazi regime, Dietrich Bonhoeffer continued to trust God. He became pastor to fellow prisoners, spoke about God's love and prayed with them.
- ❖ Mother Teresa continued to help the poor and dying of Calcutta. All she saw, day in and day out, was human misery. She never lost sight of the loving God.

There comes a time when we believe even though there's no immediate, obvious evidence that God is near by. We believe even though we can't see. *Believing is seeing, seeing with our spiritual eyes*. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said, "*How happy are those who believe without seeing me!*"

Faith in the New Testament is just this – trusting and relying on God even when our experience of God barely exists. This is where Thomas came unglued. Jesus said I would rise again. Faith has to do with relying on a promise, there are 7,480 plus promises in the Scriptures. Trusting a word, holding on to what we know about God and believing that, regardless of what happens.

Faith believes that God is true to his word. Faith believes God will never desert us. Faith believes His love always burns strongly for us. Even when the circumstances in our life might tempt us to think otherwise, faith holds on to believing that God knows what he is doing.

The Presence of Christ is within us, and our faith however shaky at times, is the vehicle that keeps us upright and guides our thoughts and actions. Whether seen or unseen, the results of living in faith, as Christ teaches through the *Greatest Commandments* (Matthew 22:36-40), will be a gift to others and ourselves, in this life and in the life to come. For now, for always, **Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!**

"Do you believe because you see me?

How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

Amen.