

Easter 2C  
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*An Invitation to Come Close*

Children have always been fascinated by me. They are inquisitive and curious and want to ask a million questions. Whether it's in the mall, the grocery store, or even at church, they genuinely want to know why and how I am different from them. "Why are your hands so small? Why do you walk funny? What happened to you?" As soon as the questions come out of their mouths, I see horror-stricken looks on many of their parents' faces. Children have not yet been programmed like us adults to believe that asking such probing, personal questions is an impolite and intrusive thing to do. What I have come to realize is that in their honest curiosity children ask the questions that adults have as well, but wouldn't dare raise in fear they might offend.

I'll never forget the three year old who asked me why I walked like a penguin. To this day, it is the best observation anyone has ever made about the way I walk. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to get to know this child. I was on summer break from college and helping out with a day camp for children. At the end of the camp, I met the boy's mother and she told me that her son came home one day so excited because he had a teacher at camp who walked just like a penguin. And wasn't that neat!

Many a time I've had parents awkwardly approach me to see if their child can ask me some questions. I always make a point to thank them for having the courage to allow their child to talk with me. Too often I have heard well-meaning parents scold their child for their innocent curiosity, "That's not nice. Don't bother that lady by asking her that." Unfortunately, the child then learns that not only are her questions and her curiosity somehow wrong, but that there is obviously something wrong with me as well. The child is never given the opportunity to get to know the real me as she so desires and to come to realize on her own that the fact that I walk like a penguin is kind of a neat thing.

Today, we hear, as we do every year on the Sunday after Easter, the story about Thomas, who unless he sees the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, and puts his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in Jesus' side, will not believe. I have always thought Thomas has gotten a bad rap in this story; for we only seem to remember him as the doubting disciple. I prefer to remember him as the curious and inquisitive one. Just like those many children over the years who have wanted to know more about me, Thomas desired to know the risen Christ with the same genuine curiosity.

Thomas had heard about Mary Magdalene's experience with the risen Christ. He also had heard from his fellow disciples about their experience with the risen Christ: Jesus showing his hands and side to his friends, offering them his peace and breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. Thomas

is fed up. He wants to experience the risen Christ for himself and not just hear about it from others.

The amazing thing is that when Jesus does appear again to his disciples, this time with Thomas present, he does not rebuke Thomas for demanding to see and even touch his wounds. In fact, he offers to meet his demands. We are not told in the story whether Thomas actually touches Jesus' wounds. This is not important. What is important is that he has a personal encounter with the risen Christ and in the experience the resurrection finally becomes real for him.

The Rev. Margaret Guenther writes, "The disciples, and especially Thomas, are urged to look at his wounds to make sure that they are in the presence of Christ--not some ghost or imposter, but their friend and teacher. Were the disciples brought up like most of us? Were they taught that it's not polite to stare, particularly not at the wounds that afflict others? Jesus urges them to probe his wounds. Most of us present carefully prepared facades. The self we offer to others is not the product of conscious deception, yet we want no one to disturb the meticulously maintained surface. The message is implicit: Don't look too closely at my wounds, please. But Jesus is saying, "Be at home with me, and don't be afraid to touch me. You will neither hurt nor offend me.'

He greets our fear and disbelief with loving acceptance, assuring us that he doesn't mind our questions and our probing. It is an invitation to come close, close enough to see the wounds and feel his risen presence.”

Like Thomas, we are not satisfied with hearing the proclamation of the resurrection. We too want to experience the risen Christ for ourselves. We want to see and touch and know that it is all for real. We really haven't changed much since our own childhoods. We still have that same inquisitiveness and curiosity deep down inside. We've just gotten much better at keeping our questions to ourselves. Unlike our children, we have become too cautious, too polite, too schooled and programmed. We have become so good at putting up our own facades-meticulously maintained surfaces so others won't dare get too close to us and our wounds and so that we don't have to get too close to the wounds of our brothers and sisters.

And yet, Jesus urges us, as he did with his first disciples, to probe his wounds, to know him beyond any meticulously maintained surface. Besides, with the risen Christ there is no meticulously maintained surface. To experience the risen Christ is to experience the nail marks in his hands and his pierced side. He doesn't mind our questioning and our curiosity. He actually embraces it. Through our questioning, through our deep desire to want to see and touch and know that the resurrection is for real,

that he is for real, he invites us into a deeper intimacy. He invites us to come so close that we do feel a little awkward and uncomfortable.

When we dare to take him up on his invitation and let go of our cautiousness, our fear, and our politeness, we suddenly find ourselves at home in the presence of the risen Christ. No longer are we simply hearing about the resurrection from others, but we are actually experiencing it for ourselves.