Wondering Thomas

Barb Ballenger, April 27, 2025

2 Easter, Year C

We tried this last week, and it took us a few tries. So let's try it again:

When I say: Alleluia! Jesus Christ is Risen from the dead!

You say:

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

….That's OK – if you didn't know what to say this week either, you're in good company. Because Thomas didn't know what to say as well in today's Gospel from John.

For some reason Thomas had missed Easter. He wasn't in the upper room on that first day when Jesus entered through locked doors and said *Peace be With You* to the disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit into them.

When Thomas finally joined them, he was greeted with his friends rushing up and saying the equivalent of "Jesus is risen from the dead!"

And Thomas responded with: "I can't believe it."

To which they probably said: I know, right!?

I can imagine Thomas saying "No. I really can't believe it. I can't believe you, even though I know you. It's too much. I won't believe …until…. until I see the man who I saw die on the cross, with all the marks of his crucifixion. Then I'll believe."

Enter Doubting Thomas.

Then two really interesting things happen in this story from John.

A week after Easter – today in fact – Jesus appears again in the upper room, where interestingly the doors are still locked, and Thomas is there. And Jesus gives Thomas what he wants: Belief. That's what was on the other side of Thomas' ultimatum: I won't believe **until …** I put my finger in the nail prints on his hands and my hand into the wound on his side. I've got to know it's really him.

Because Thomas had known Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. He had heard him, and seen him with his own eyes, he had touched him and had carefully watched him. And he knew the horrible death he died. And this is the Jesus that he would recognize, the only one he would believe in.

So the first thing that happens is that Jesus heals his unbelief: do not doubt, but believe. And Thomas, probably relieved, does not have to put his fingers into the wounds. He recognizes Jesus. He recognizes God in Jesus. He lets them in through the closed door of his own heart.

The second thing that happens is this little turn in the story, meant for John's community, who are tuning in about 60 to 70 years after the first Easter. Jesus says to Thomas. "Did you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, but still believe."

That statement is about John's community and it's about us. John's community was probably in Syria, far from Jerusalem where Jesus rose from the dead. And the eyewitnesses who "Have seen the Lord!" are long gone. And there is a big argument going on about whether Jesus was human or God or neither or both. And despite that, Jesus does not appear on the other side of their locked doors saying "Peace be with you."

Instead the people who first heard this version of the story had to recognize Jesus in things like the breaking of the bread, and the unity they were trying to restore in their community, and in the Resurrection story that had been written down for them and handed to them, and in the great hope that Jesus was coming back really, really soon.

This is what we get as well, we who have not seen the risen Jesus with nail marks and all -- and still insist on believing. The Body of Christ that appears to us in its Easter best is this body right here, made up of the people all around you, and tuning in on the live stream, and celebrating Easter throughout the world.

. There are wounds among us, and we have known suffering and death, and yet we, the Body of Christ, live and live and live.

And one of the things we live with is doubt. Which is why Thomas is a pretty good saint for us. Because we live in a time where people insist they will not believe until … until there is enough evidence, or they have seen it on their favorite social media platform, or they hear it from their favorite influencer.

So it's refreshing to see someone in the story say: I'm struggling with believing this, here.

And right now doubt, the right kind of doubt – is not a bad thing. But the wrong kind of doubt can ruin everything..

By the right kind of doubt, I mean the kind of thinking that is not blown this way and that by all the information that is bombarding us. Good doubt thinks about things, and asks wondering questions -- like we learn in Godly Play and in listening circles. Good doubt knows there are many stories out there and wonders who is being left

out when it only hears one voice. This is the kind of doubt that actually prompts us to wonder if there is more truth to discover and to keep looking for it.

Thomas had this kind of doubt. It made him ask things like: I wonder if that really is Jesus? I wonder what it would take for me to be sure? Maybe we should call him Wondering Thomas instead of Doubting Thomas.

So that's the good kind of doubt. There is also a bad kind of doubt that does not ask wondering questions. It stops any wondering at all. This doubt shows up when we are faced with something that asks us to change, especially if we don't want to change. It doesn't say I won't believe until…. It says I won't believe at all, if it means I have to give something up.

A little of this doubt can bring important change to a grinding halt. It's the kind of "reasonable doubt" that kept people from believing that they could get cancer from smoking cigarettes. It's the kind of doubt that keeps people from getting vaccinated against COVID or measles. It's the kind of doubt that prevents people from wondering if all the stuff that we make and buy and throw away might be hurting our planet and heating our climate. It only believes one story, the person's own story, and none other.

This is doubt that doesn't really care to know the truth. It just doesn't want things to change.

As Christians this kind of doubt -- doubt that has no wonder in it -- might very well prevent us from recognizing Jesus if he walked through our locked doors today. It might prevent us from doing the courageous work that the Holy Spirit is prompting us to in our doubt-riddled world.

Easter days, put down that old doubt and pick up wonder instead. So when we hear in the way people live and love:

Alleluia! Jesus Christ is Risen from the dead!

We can respond with confidence:

The Lord has Risen indeed! Alleluia.