

“Put Your Hand in my Wounds”

Easter 2

April 11, 2021

St. Peter’s

The expression “Doubting Thomas” has become a familiar idiom in our English language. We know it.... we understand its meaning and have probably said it ourselves. I am not sure, however, if its meaning is an entirely a fair characterization of Thomas the Disciple. The Gospel according to John records several incidents in which Thomas appears, and from them we can gain some impression of the sort of man he was. When Jesus insisted on going to Judea, to visit his friends at Bethany, it was the disciple Thomas who boldly declared, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” He certainly never lacked courage

and obviously loved Jesus to the extent of dying with him. At the Last Supper, he interrupted our Lord's discourse with the question, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

Thomas was a concrete thinker. He needed specific directions and clear goals. I think, not unlike many of us. But in today's Gospel, after Christ's resurrection, Thomas would not accept the account of the other apostles and the women, until Jesus appeared before him, showing him his wounds. From this one narrative Thomas has been assigned "doubter". Tennyson wrote: "There lives more faith in honest doubt, Believe me, than in half the creeds." In Thomas' need to touch Jesus, he was uncompromisingly honest. He absolutely

refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. He would not deny his doubts by pretending that they did not exist. He was not the kind of man who would pronounce creeds without understanding what it was about. And so, as Tennyson put it, there is more ultimate faith in the man who insists on being sure than in the man who repeats things which he has never thought out. It is doubt like this, which in the end arrives at certainty. And so, I have made my plea for Thomas as a man who loved his Lord in a truthful and authentic way. What is impressive about this story for me, though, is not just the person Thomas, but the way in which Thomas wants his doubts removed. Let

us look for a moment at the scene again.

I would characterize this environment and community in the upper room as one in crisis. These friends and followers of Jesus must surely have been in tremendous grief over his death. They must have felt sadness and confusion. Fear for their own safety and security was in question. But where was Thomas when Jesus appeared the first time? Was he in so much pain over the loss of his Lord that he had to go away from the community - in isolation -to grieve? Whatever the answer, it is certain that this time of crisis had a devastating impact on the disciple's self-confidence and hopes for the future. So, Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them the

first time. He had only heard that Jesus came to them. Thomas told his friends unless I see the print of the nails and unless I put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Now when Jesus came to them the second time, knowing Thomas’ heart Jesus, himself invited Thomas to look at his hands and touch his side. When Thomas touched the wounds of Jesus, I believe an especially important message was imparted to him and to us. When Jesus rose from the grave his wounds were still visible. The marks of his self-giving love found forever a place in his glorified body. As Thomas touched his wounds he was then, and only then, able to feel and truly trust in a God who could know and understand our pain, brokenness, and sorrows. Henri

Nouwen puts it so well in his book Heart Speaks to Heart. “Lord Jesus, you always call me closer to your wounded heart. There you want me to know true joy and peace. Gradually I realize that in your heart, seeing and not seeing, hearing and not hearing, touching and not touching, are not contradictions. To Thomas who heard your voice, saw your wounds, and touched your pierced side, you said, “You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” There, O dear Lord, is the mystery of your love. I have not seen you and yet I truly see you every time I look at the broken bodies of my fellow human beings. I have not heard you, and yet I truly hear you every time I hear the cries uttered by men,

women, and children in pain. I have not touched you, and yet I truly touch you every time I touch all those who come to me in their loneliness. Amid all the human brokenness and human pain, I see, hear, and touch the heart of humanity, the humanity of all people embraced by your love.”

As a hospital chaplain, experiencing crisis is not an unusual occurrence. The hospital encounter by its own nature is often a time of crisis for the patient and their family. And the wounds that I have seen are not only the physical ones but the emotional and spiritual as well. We tend not to bother with theological issues or questioning the meaning of life until faced with a crisis. We then begin to pay

attention to our own wounds and those of others. People that I visit with tell me again and again how their illness or disease or separation from their loved ones has been the very catalyst toward renewed hope and faith.

In his passionate book, *Lament for a Son*, Nicholas Wolterstorff shares these poignant words, after the death of his son in a mountain-climbing accident. "Put your hand into my wounds, said the risen Jesus to Thomas, and you will know who I am. The wounds of Christ are his identity. They tell us who he is. He did not lose them. They went down into the grave with him-visible and tangible. Rising did not remove them. He who broke the bonds of death kept his wounds.

To believe in Christ's rising from the grave is to rise up now from all our dark graves of suffering love. If sympathy for the world's wounds is not enlarged by our anguish, if love for those around us is not expanded, if gratitude for what is good does not flame up, if insight is not deepened, if commitment to what is important is not strengthened, if aching for a new day is not intensified, if hope is weakened and faith diminished, if from the experience of death comes nothing good, then death has won. Then death be proud.

So, I shall struggle to live the reality of Christ's rising and death's dying. In my living, my son's dying will not be the last word. But as I rise, I bear the wounds of his death. My rising does not remove them.

They mark me. If you want to know who I am, put your hand in.”

**When Thomas put his hand in Jesus’ side-he was sure-so sure
that all he said was “My Lord and my God.” Alleluia, Alleluia, The Lord
Has Risen Indeed!**