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Thomas Remembered

Prayer for Enlightenment

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

If you have been around church much in your life, you have heard this story about Thomas before. Every year, the first Sunday following Easter is the day on which we hear this story of Thomas.

Somewhere back in history, this story became known as the story about “Doubting Thomas.” I have never been clear on what that means.

Did Thomas doubt because Easter is too close to April Fools Day and Thomas knew that he was no fool?

Did Thomas doubt the other disciples?

After all, the ones who told him that they had seen the Lord were not the most reliable of witnesses. Peter had thought he could walk on water...he also swore that he would stay with Jesus until the end, yet he denied him three times that first night.

The other disciples had gone into hiding upon Jesus’ death; they were afraid they would be arrested and crucified.

No, I don’t blame Thomas for doubting the disciples. He had lived with this bunch of clowns for 3-years. He knew them...he knew how unreliable they were.

Or did Thomas doubt that Jesus was alive? If this is the case, then I don’t think that Thomas doubted so much as he remembered. He remembers the awful violence and will not dismiss it because of some resurrection-talk.

After all, he remembers that Jesus had wounds on his body that no human had ever survived.

Actually, I think Thomas would make a good United Methodist.

The core of our United Methodist faith is founded upon Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.

Scripture is first and most important. What does the Bible say? asks this stream of thought.

Tradition asks how has this been viewed by the church over centuries.

Reason asks what is *reasonable* in light of what we know in many other disciplines.

Experience asks what is our own experience in this area.

The disciple Thomas had experience with death.
That experience said, when you are dead, you are dead.
As a good Jew, he likely believed that Jesus would live again at the end of time, but Thomas had no experience with resurrection. My guess is that he did not even know the word. Thomas' experience was that when you are dead you are dead.

I don't think Thomas doubted...I think he remembered.
He remembered his previous experiences with death.
He remembered the broken and bloody body of Jesus...there was no doubt.
He. Was. Dead.

Remember...none of the disciples believed Jesus was alive...not until they saw him with their own eyes.

Remember when "Crazy Mary" came dancing back from the tomb that first Easter morning they did not believe her. I think that the disciples said things like:

- It just Mary (Crazy Mary)...she can be excitable you know.
- Mary, Mary, Mary, calm down, we all want to see Jesus, but that just isn't possible anymore.
- Of course we will see him again Mary, when we all are raised to life at the end of time, but this is not the end of time, Mary. It just feels like it is the end of time.
- We miss him too Mary. We will get along, we still have each other. Pull yourself together, spouting off like this only makes it harder

And that's what strikes me about this story: the realism.
That is why I think Thomas would make a good United Methodist.
Thomas remembered his experiences, both his experiences of death and his experience of Jesus' death.
I think he also remembered his experience with his fellow disciples.
He knew all-too-well how unreliable they could be.

I don't think Thomas was a doubter...I think he was a realist.

Then Jesus comes and shows his hands and side. He shows the piercing that the nails left.
The second time Jesus comes to the upper room, he not only shows his wounds and scars, but he invites Thomas to touch them.

It seems to me that that just seeing Jesus was not enough, he must also invite Thomas to touch the scars. It is too shocking, too mind-blowing, too confusing to see Jesus standing before him so clearly alive. It was beyond any experience that he had before.
And Thomas, the good United Methodist that he was, realized that this experience was beyond any he had before. Thomas fell to his knees saying, "My Lord and my God."
The reality of the scars and the wounds on Jesus reveal the extraordinary truth of the resurrection.

It is easy for Easter to be a time of joyous celebration. We have just come through the 40-disciplined-days of Lent. Spring is beginning...at least Spring is supposed to beginning. Easter is a bright celebration of Spring and new life after the cold, gray winter.

But resurrection is so much more than that.

It is joyful, but not the party joy that fades away as the party ends.

It is about new life, but it is about so much more than new life bursting out of the ground all around us.

Easter is seen in the wounds and the scars.

Easter resurrection is in the wounds of life when we allow God to Easter in us.

Resurrection is about the different pattern that God puts onto the harsh things of life.

Resurrection does not deny the wounds and pain of life.

In other words, resurrection is not a pretty picture covering up the nasty parts of life.

Resurrection is the reality of God with us.

Resurrection is the difference God makes.

Resurrection is the confusing change that turns our ideas upside-down...and in the process gives us life and hope again.

We are Easter people.

I am convinced that Christianity will wither away without Easter.

But sometimes we question...like Thomas we remember.

We question the reality of resurrection...I mean can someone (anyone?) really come back from the dead?

But mostly, I think we question that the Resurrection is for us today.

In other words, what difference does the resurrection make in our lives today?

Maybe resurrection is too uncomfortable and too confusing.

Maybe we would rather leave resurrection alone until we too finally face death.

After all, having our ideas, our expectations, our whole way of life turned upside-down IS uncomfortable.

Change IS disturbing.

Where would you like to see resurrection?

Where would you like to see God's pattern on the wounds and scars of life?

Where would you like to have God EASTER in you and around you?

Would resurrection be in areas of personal struggles...such as illness and disappointment?

What would resurrection mean for you there...what needs to change?

Would resurrection be in the Church struggling to communicate the great-good-news to the people and places of today?

What needs to be turned upside-down for this to happen?

Would resurrection be in the world filled with trouble? I long to see resurrection in Iran and Ukraine and Hudson, where people are hungry and in need of security.

We need God to EASTER within and through us.

But Easter people need to be tough. Easter people need to work among and through the struggle and pain for resurrection to come. We would not know resurrection if Jesus' first followers had not risked to proclaim this message of resurrection and the new life it brings.

God Eastered within them...and they became Easter people.

In the end, Thomas too, was EASTERED.
His experience of the risen Christ upended his life.

Resurrection is at the heart of our faith today.
I believe it is worth our struggle and our prayer.
It is worth the challenge to our comfort.
It is worth the pain of staying with the hard and the difficult.

May God EASTER in us, just as God did so in Thomas, the early disciples and the many, many others in the centuries since that first resurrection.

He is risen.
He is risen indeed.
Alleluia.
Alleluia.

Amen.