

Blessed Jesus walk with us in our faith and, we fervently pray, accompany us so much more in our certainty. Amen.

Have you ever been late? Overslept, lost track of time? Forgot to set the clock to “fall back” and ended up at church just in time for the Prayers of the People? Do you remember the days before VCR’s, DVR’s and streaming services? Imagine, we actually had to be there when the actual airing of our favorite show was broadcast on TV or wait for a rerun. Inconveniences? Perhaps. But definitely not tragedies.

But could you imagine what it was like for Thomas as he returned to where the disciples gathered in that locked room on the first day of the week after the Resurrection? Thomas expects to find them the way he left them, sequestered in that place out of fear, wary of every sound, every creak. Instead, he hears excited voices. “Jesus is alive”, his friends cry. “He was here with us. It was really him, Thomas. We even saw his wounds. He wished us Peace and he breathed upon us! Oh, Thomas, you should have been here!”

I wonder, what would your reaction have been? Disappointment? Incredulity? Feeling totally left out? Certainly, Thomas knows what the women have told the others about Jesus’ Resurrection. He has heard Peter and the other disciple’s account of the empty tomb. And yet, he says he will not believe until he sees Jesus for himself; until he actually touches Jesus’ wounds.

Now, I’d like to think that I’d have been one of those people that would have just believed, right there on the spot; that I would not have questioned what my friends were saying. But if I’m being perfectly honest, I would want to see for myself. It’s kind of like being told about your surprise birthday party that took place without your presence. It’s hard to muster the same level of excitement when the experience is given second-hand.

So, Thomas wants his own experience of the risen Lord. And he does not seem to be at all confused or self-conscious about this. Too often I think we are embarrassed or afraid of being judged if we admit to our doubts out loud. Our culture insists we have absolute confidence in what we say we believe. Admitting we are not quite sure, that our faith in God’s presence in the face of adversity is at times a bit shaky, might be taken as tantamount to having no faith at all.

Frederick Buechner said, *“Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don’t have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.”*¹

¹ I thank the Rev. MaryAnn McKibben Dana for highlighting this quote from Frederick Buechner.

So, it seems to me that Thomas is courageous in his skepticism. Thomas is the one that is not afraid to question, not afraid admit he does not know everything. If we look back that night in the upper room, after Jesus washes the feet of his beloved friends, he tells the disciples he goes to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house. He tells them he will return for them, “*so that where I am, you may be there also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.*”

But Thomas isn’t completely following him. “*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*” I’m not sure if Thomas’ questioning was a blessing or an annoyance to Jesus, but his answer is simple and plain. “*I am the way, the truth, the light. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also.*” If not for the questioning of Thomas, we would have never heard those beautiful words, so precious to our Christian faith.

It is as if Jesus speaks directly to him. *Thomas, just think for a minute, have confidence in yourself. You know who I am, you know the way that I have taught you. Look to me, remember all that you have witnessed, and you will realize that you do know the way, the true way I have shown you to live in God’s light.*

So, yes, Thomas does know these things. And he knows Jesus is not in the tomb. Author Madeline L’Engle, when asked, “*Do you believe in God without any doubts?*”, replied, “*I believe in God with all my doubts.*”

So, while all of the others were hidden away in that room, cloaked in their fear. I think Thomas was out looking for Jesus in the streets of the city;

looking for Jesus in the places he was most likely to be,
where Jesus always is and always will be,
out with the people on the margins,
the poor, the outcast, the sinners,
to the ones living in fear.

When Jesus returns to that same room a week later, he invites Thomas to do the very thing Thomas desires....to touch him, to place his hand in the wounds, to have the experience Thomas needs in that time and place with his Lord and God. For Thomas, seeing may be believing, but he also wants to touch Jesus, to hear and feel, to be close enough to engage all his senses. And Thomas does not shy away from drawing close to Jesus’ wounds, to the pain and guilt that he himself was experiencing at leaving the side of his dear friend as he died. And blessed forgiveness is what he receives in that intimacy.

Though it does not say in John’s gospel that Jesus breathed his Spirit upon Thomas that day, it is clear that Thomas was awake and alive in the Spirit. The tradition of the church tells us that Thomas was the disciple that carried the Good News of Jesus, the risen Christ, beyond the borders of the Roman Empire to as far as South India. I think it’s likely that John includes this story so that it might affirm those faithful people who believed, even though they had not

seen. And I believe it also affirms those of us that have our doubts from time to time, who wonder where God is in all of, what Jon Kabat-Zin called the “full catastrophe of life”.

American historian John Meacham writes, *“One of the earliest resurrection scenes in the Bible is that of Thomas demanding evidence—he wanted to see, to touch, to prove. Those who question and probe and debate are heirs of the apostles just as much as the most fervent of believers.”*

Jesus did not look for perfect people to be his companions and to carry out the work of his Father. He chose regular ordinary human beings. He chose people who he knew would deny him, would run from his side, who would hide, and then would carry on as he taught them, no matter the consequences. And Jesus chose a man who didn't hold back from asking questions and being skeptical about what his friends told him. He chose someone who just wanted to know for himself.

One of the things I appreciate most about being a part of the Episcopal Church is the willingness we have to openly talk about our joys and our challenges as believers. And I do not doubt that the Spirit is present in this community this day, most especially because we are here together, doing the best we can, to be the Body of Christ.

Amen.