

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Easter Evening

Gospel Lesson

John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon Focus

This week's sermon takes place on Easter evening and the following week. The disciples are hiding in the upper room, afraid of meeting the same fate as Jesus. Jesus appears to them (all but Thomas who was not there), and breathes his breath upon them. In this breath, this giving of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also commissions them to go forth into the world and do God's work to be the real, tangible, embodied presence of divine love in the world.

Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples and upon hearing their witness said that if he didn't see the wounds of Christ he would not believe. A week later, Jesus appeared to them again, this time, Thomas was there. Thomas knew that the resurrected Christ would still bear the scars, that the marks of the wounds would actually identify him as Jesus. When he asked to see the wounds, Jesus showed him. Our sermon emphasized that even when the context around us is changing, our identity in Christ does not. Wounded or broken, we still engage in the mission of the church, the body of Christ. The way we engage the mission will look different, will feel different. But our identity as the church is still made known by the marks of

the wounds we have received, the redemption of those marks, and the imminent resurrection that takes place despite them.

Discussion Questions

1. In this week's sermon we were reminded of how our context speaks into our reading of the biblical text. Can you name a time that your context deeply spoke into your reading of the Bible?
2. This week we meet the disciples, lacking the courage to go out (and who can blame them). Where have you found the courage to go out and to press forward?
3. Our sermon today addressed the idea that we, like the disciples, have experienced a collective trauma. Describe the collective trauma that we are sharing right now.
4. Three days after the arrest, two days after the crucifixion, the disciples were still afraid and didn't know what to do. Have you ever found yourself stuck in fear? Where did you eventually find Jesus, and find comfort?
5. What wounds have marked you as person that in some ways (good and bad) they define you?
6. Where was Thomas on Easter evening?
7. Why do you think that Thomas was the first one to recognize Jesus as God?

Bible Focus

Our sermon for this week brought up the importance of context. Multiple times throughout John's Gospel Jesus will say darn near the exact same thing to different people at different times, and they have entirely different reactions depending on their context.

In a similar way, context speaks into *how we read* the Bible. We saw in this week's sermon how Pastor Andy could relate the COVID-19 pandemic to today's Bible story. This is a mark of good preaching and a Bible that is so alive with the Holy Spirit and the Good News of Jesus that it's words, the Word, remains alive and active in all generations and contexts.

Often, each generation (or a few) will have a particular interpretation of a Bible story depending on their context. For most of Christian History, this Bible story of Easter evening and the week that followed has been known as the story of "Doubting Thomas." Thomas has been lifted up as a figure for those of us who struggle to believe in Jesus and Jesus' resurrection. And though this common theme has remained throughout time, each generational context has influenced the interpretation a bit differently.

Today, (in postmodern Christian interpretation) the question of Thomas's faithfulness and witness are paired more deeply with Jesus's woundedness. This is actually also true of 4th and 5th century Christian authors. We ask ourselves, "what does it mean that the risen, resurrected Christ, still has open wounds?" We don't just consider Thomas's faith or lack of it, but we pair it with the Jesus who stands in front of him.

Therefore, we, like past Christians, lift Thomas up as a figure for those of us who struggle to believe in Jesus and Jesus' resurrection; but ALSO now look at this story to ask about the

woundedness of the body of Jesus, to witness to the wounds of Christ and WHY they were important to Thomas and why they should be important to us.

The relationships, those of Jesus and Thomas, Jesus and the world, Thomas and the other disciples; are at the center of our current interpretations. This can lead us not just to ask if we believe in Jesus or if we doubt, but how, as the body of Christ, in our own woundedness, we can still be and do the work of the church.

Discussion Questions

1. Is God capable of giving Jesus a resurrected body without wounds? If so, why does Jesus' resurrected body still have wounds?
2. Is there a Bible story whose meaning has changed for you over time, depending on your context?
3. Reflect on the mystery of the dynamic nature of the Bible and its ability to speak to all people over all of time.

Prayer

Redeeming God of the resurrection, we thank you for your body, this body of Christ that unites us and binds us together. We ask that you help us to acknowledge our woundedness and where we have wounded others. We ask that we may witness to your breath of the Holy Spirit sending us out into the world to do your redeeming work. Help us to be your people, today, as you have for all generations past. In the name of your Son and by the Power of the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

*The risen Christ breathes into us the breath of new life,
encouraging us, sending us as God sent him,
to be an incarnate expression of selfless love in the world.*