

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Jesus and Thomas

Sermon Reflection Notes

This week we read the scripture we typically refer to as the story of 'Doubting Thomas.' Thomas missed the meeting the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples; he wasn't there and when he heard about it, he didn't really believe it. In fact, he demanded proof. He wanted to see the scars, to touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. We can relate to Thomas. It seems like an improbable story; we too sometimes need proof.

"But when Jesus came to the disciples again, with Thomas now in the room, Thomas no longer needed proof. He no longer needed to see the scars of Jesus' wounds. Instead, Thomas knew in his bones who was standing before him. "My Lord and my God" was Thomas' ecstatic response.

Thomas then knew that Easter means our worst moments and our worst days do not define us. We can learn, our trust can grow, and we can be transformed. Our stories are not determined by our failures. Guilt, shame and regret do not get the final word over us. The risen Jesus comes to us, again and again, inviting us to experience resurrection right here and right now." (from *Christian Century*, April 2024 24)

Rev. Schuermann shared the example of a woman he knew named Mary. Mary had been an active part of the community in his town, until she wasn't. A divorce had happened. Hard feelings grew. Mary disappeared, and no one really knew where she went. Much later, Mary came back. She was in the end stages of cancer and had nowhere else to go. Her ex-husband took her in. Hospice was arranged. When Rev. Schuermann was called to visit her near the end of her life, he shared that Mary had changed. Her ex-husband told him that when asked why she was so different, Mary said she had met Jesus. She had a list of people with whom she wanted to talk. She wanted to ask forgiveness and give forgiveness. She was offering peace and love until the end.

"We might say that there are only two stories we ever need to know. Only two stories and endless variations of them. There's the story of the Fall and there's the story of Redemption. There's the story of the crucifixion and the story of the resurrection. The story of Good Friday and the story of Easter Sunday. There is the story of how humans are destroying creation and there is the story of how God is redeeming it. There is the story told by the powers and principalities that are passing away, and the story of the eternal Kingdom of God. There are only two stories. **And we become the one we believe.**"

(*Journal for Preachers*, Easter, 2024 14)

Scripture

John 20:24-29 (NRSVUE)

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So 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."

²⁶ A 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." ²⁷ Then 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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus tells the disciples 4 things: Peace be with you. I'm sending you, as I was sent. Receive the Holy Spirit. Forgive. Rev. Schuermann put it this way: Jesus gave the disciples (and us) Peace, Power, and Purpose.
How does practicing forgiveness (our purpose) help bring us to new life and help us build the Kingdom of God?
2. This week, Jesus tells the disciples, including Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." We often mishear this line. We think it says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." What's the difference? Why does the wording matter?
3. What things in our lives do we believe even though we haven't seen them?

[We are going to flip the script for the rest of the study guide. Instead of questions, we are giving you an 'answer' and would like you to think about and discuss what questions and ideas it evokes.]

4. "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." (*Wishful Thinking* by Frederick Buechner 20)
5. "The purpose of crucifixion is to bury the people who are still alive and to fill them with fear—to silence their resolve for a better world." (*Journal for Preachers 2024 42*)

6.

Jesus gives them a Spirit
and sends them back into the world.

It is the birth of the church.

And God's Spirit that doesn't flinch.

This Spirit that overwhelms their despair.

--this Spirit that prevails in the face of rejection.

With that Spirit, the disciples are sent back into the world:

"As God has sent me, so I send you."

Or try this paraphrase:

"As God got me out of my tomb:

I am getting you out of your tomb."

Then he breathes on us and tells us to do the same.

(Journal for Preachers 2024 46)

Closing Prayer

Holy and forgiving God, you come to find us behind the doors we lock because of our fear, our doubt, our hostility, our confusion. You come to us to speak words of forgiveness and love that release us from those locked places in our lives. Give us courage to forgive ourselves and each other, even as you forgive us. Breathe your Holy Spirit on us once more so that we can live as people who have received resurrection and new life. Help us to be Easter People. We pray in the name of Jesus, who comes to us over and over again. Amen.

*"Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*