

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

“The Story of Doubting Thomas is About Gratitude, Not Doubt”

It is the ancient tradition of the Church to retell the stories of Jesus appearing to people after the resurrection on the Sundays after Easter. The story of Doubting Thomas is always the first post-resurrection story, told on the Sunday immediately following Easter. As we revisit the narrative of Thomas, we often miss the point. The story of Doubting Thomas is not about doubt, but gratitude.

You know the story. Jesus’ disciples are gathered when their resurrected rabbi shows up. But one of the twelve, Thomas, was not present to witness it. When the other disciples recount the event, Thomas does not believe, saying, “Unless I can see the mark of the nails in his hands, unless I can put my finger in the mark of the nails, unless I can put my hand in his side, unless, unless, unless, I will not believe.”

You know how it goes: A week later the disciples were again in the house, only this time Thomas was with them. The doors were shut and Jesus appeared a second time. Making a beeline straight to Thomas, Jesus invites Thomas to put his fingers in the wounds. The doubting disciple exclaims that now he believes. Instead of Doubting Thomas, he is now Believing Thomas. He is grateful, so grateful that Jesus came to him. “My Lord and my God” is the response of Thomas. May “My Lord and My God” be the response of each one of us today.

The story is familiar in the church, even culturally familiar. What do we call someone who is skeptical? Doubting Thomas. And we, as people of faith, we especially are fond of Thomas. Since we, too, have doubts, he is our patron saint.

Having your dead friend show up for dinner is about the least expected thing, least familiar thing you can image. But Jesus did something very familiar, and by the way, very Jewish. He blesses them. He says, “peace.”

I do not have any familiarity with dead dinner guests, but I know a thing about peace, about grace, about gratitude. It is our business as Christians. Be generous, be grateful, seek peace, work for justice, do not fear, but be Christ-like in all situations.

The disciples were locked tight in that room because they were afraid. And in their fear, Jesus shows up, breathes on them and speaks “peace.” And just like that, their fear evaporates.

Jesus is dead. The disciples return to their room to hide and to remember and to mourn what almost was. But God says, No more!” God is out of patience with history’s Pharaohs and Caesars and injustice and hunger and oppression and violence and death and the whole sad thing. And so, Jesus rises. The tomb is empty.

And where does Jesus go? Back to Calvary’s hill to point and shout, “Look, the cross?” Back to the wilderness to confront Satan?

No. Jesus rises and goes back to his friends who were hiding out in fear.

Gratefulness banishes fear, thanksgiving replaces grief. There is peace.

Easter is about the power of God in Christ to defeat death and despair. It is also about our powerlessness, our vulnerability, our fear in the face of death and despair. We really do need God to do for us that which we can never do for ourselves.

Easter is about believing that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. It took Thomas a second chance to believe. God will give you as many chances as you need.

When Jesus came forth from the tomb on Easter, a whole new world was made available to us. Newness. Life. A second chance. Even as Jesus rose from death to life, so can we. Easter promises that we can change. New life can be ours. Easter was an explosion

that changed the world. Has it
changed you?