A.M.D.G. 2nd Sunday After Easter – C Text: John 20: 19-31

 April 3rd, 2016

*When 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.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.’*

*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.’ 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.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’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.’*

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But 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.*

**Seeking Doubters**

I’d like you to help me out this morning by raising your hand to the following statements that you think are true:

\* Most lipstick contains fish scales

***\** The electric chair was invented by a dentist**

*\** The longest bout of hiccups lasted 10 years *(false – one man had them for 69 years!*

\* Each of us is made up of 7 octillion atoms (7 followed by 27 zeros) that are mostly empty space. If you could squeeze all the empty space out of those atoms, you could reduce the entire human race to the size of a sugar lump.

\* There are 14 million insects on earth for every single human being.

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**\* The English drive on the left side of the road, because in the middle ages** **knights rode on the left side of the road. This allowed them to use** **their weapons better and quicker.**

**\* Mona Lisa - the famous painting by 'Da Vinci' - does not have** **eyebrows. In that time it was the fashion**.

**\* Mosquitos have teeth.**

**\* The Nobel Peace Prize depicts 3 naked men with their hands on each other’s shoulders**

**\* The game of Ping - Pong comes from China**.

***\** A group of geese on the ground is a gaggle; a group of geese in the air is a skein**

***\** A ‘jiffy’ – as in “I’ll be with you in a jiffy” – is an actual unit of time.**

***\** The weight of all the termites in the world is 10 times heavier than the weight of all the world’s humans put together**

**\* And how about this one ….. the resurrection involved the resuscitation of Jesus’ body. That is – Jesus became alive again in a flesh and blood sense after the crucifixion.**

**Ahh ….. that’s a bit harder for some of us, isn’t it?! I think it would be an interesting exercise if the Worship Committee decided one Easter morning to set up a polygraph machine or lie detector at the door before worshippers entered the sanctuary – just to get a reading on how many would be truthful in saying that they don’t question or doubt anything about the Easter story as presented in the Gospels. The truth is, I suspect – about that and many other ‘faith’ questions – that there is a bit of a Doubting Thomas in all of us – just as there is a believer in all of us. And we’re obviously in good company – because most of those there at that first Easter had trouble taking it all in as well.**

It was Easter evening John tells us. After the public execution of Jesus, his closest friends and followers did the prudent thing: they went into hiding. Someone found a safe house in Jerusalem - a room big enough for all of them, a stout door with a strong bolt. And they had been there, hiding in that room, since Friday afternoon - trying to be inconspicuous, waiting for the furor surrounding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus to settle - afraid that if they were seen publicly they would be identified as his friends, arrested and crucified.

Earlier that day, before dawn, a few of the women had ventured out while it was still dark. They had gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices and ointments and had returned breathless, almost hysterical -babbling something about the tomb being open, his body gone, about angels and earthquakes.

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Mary even claimed to have seen and talked to him. The ones in the room behind locked doors dismissed it. An “idle tale,” they concluded.

And then - that evening - something happened that none of them would *ever* forget - something that made all the difference in the world - something that challenged everything they thought they knew about life and death. Suddenly he was there - Jesus. Was it an apparition? Did they imagine it?

And what he said was “Peace be with you.” He said it a second time so they wouldn’t miss the point: “Peace be with you.” And then he told them why he was there, why they were given this Easter experience: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

The point was to get these people out of that room – and continuing what Jesus had started. The point was to give them enough peace, enough of his spirit—his life and breath—to get them up and moving again. The point of ***Easter***—is to get frightened, discouraged men and women who are very much inclined to stay put - to get up and moving toward the door, toward the streets of the city, toward their homes and families and communities— ‘inspired’ – filled with the breath of the Spirit – to be the body of Christ in the world.

But first, one of the company is missing. He’s actually one of my favorites, Thomas. Commentator, Frederick Buechner thinks Thomas just wanted some fresh air, wanted to get away from the heavy oppression of that locked room, that prison, so he’s having a cup of coffee or sitting on a park bench feeding pigeons. I think he’s out grocery shopping. I think Thomas - the practical, the dependable, the realist - is out buying food because everyone else is too frightened to move.

He’s got a name in many Christian circles that I don’t like. He’s known as Doubting Thomas. But in fact, he’s really Realistic Thomas, Dependable Thomas - and I like the way he thinks. He’s not there when Jesus appears and breathes on the disciples and sends them out. And when he returns with the food, they try to tell him. They’re all talking at once and they’re sounding as hysterical and ridiculous as the women had earlier. *“Unless I see it too—see the evidence, see the nail holes in his hands—I’m not believing it. No way.”* The late Raymond Brown, a wonderful New Testament scholar, observed that the Greek is extraordinarily emphatic here - something like, “*I’ll never believe it; do you think I’m crazy?”*

I think Thomas simply says what you and I would have said in that situation: “*Show me*.” He gets the title Doubting Thomas because many of us have somehow gotten the idea that having faith means never having any doubts. Thomas is an important reminder that doubt is not only compatible with faith but is actually a normal, natural part of faith.

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Douglas John Hall - looking back on his very distinguished career as a teaching theologian, says that in our time religious faith has come to mean intellectual certainty.

Christian faith has come to mean believing certain ideas about God and Jesus to be true. But faith, Hall says, is more a matter of relationship and trust. Christian faith is more a matter of *trusting* and *following* Jesus Christ, than believing ideas *about* him. And wrestling with our doubts is integral to that.

I like what the poet Rilke wrote: *“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and learn to love the questions themselves.”*

John’s Gospel tells us it was one week later. They are still in the room, and this time Thomas is there when Jesus appears again. “Peace be with you,” he says. Then to Thomas*, “Put your finger here—see my hands. Reach out your hand.*” And the most amazing thing happens: after all that, Thomas doesn’t do it - doesn’t touch the evidence his doubts demanded. Instead, he offers a confession of faith and trust: *“My Lord and my God.*” And then Thomas and the others get up, walk out the door, and change the world.

Faith is not having all our questions answered, all our doubts resolved. Faith is not the *absence* of doubt - but of trusting God *in spite* of our doubt – of finding God in the *midst* of our doubt. Faith is getting up and leaving our locked rooms and walking into the future unafraid. May it be so.

Thanks be to God.

Answers to questions at beginning:

\* Most lipstick contains fish scales *(true)*

***\** The electric chair was invented by a dentist *(true)***

*\** The longest bout of hiccups lasted 10 years *(false – one man had them for 69 years!)*

*\** Each of us is made up of 7 octillion atoms (7 followed by 27 zeros) that are mostly empty space. If you could squeeze all the empty space out of those atoms, you could reduce the entire human race to the size of a sugar lump. *(True)*

\* There are 14 million insects on earth for every single human being. (*False. In fact there are at least 140 million insects per person.)*

**\* The English drive on the left side of the road, because in the middle ages** **knights rode on the left side of the road. This allowed them to use** **their weapons better and quicker. *(true)***

**\* Mona Lisa - the famous painting by 'Da Vinci' - does not have** **eyebrows. In that time it was the fashion**. *(true)*

**\* Mosquitos have teeth. *(true)***

**\* The Nobel Peace Prize depicts 3 naked men with their hands on each other’s shoulders *(true)***

**\* The game of Ping - Pong comes from China**. (*False - The game originated as a sport in England during the 1880s)*

***\** A group of geese on the ground is a gaggle; a group of geese in the air is a skein *(true)***

***\** A ‘jiffy’ – as in “I’ll be with you in a jiffy” – is an actual unit of time. *(true – it is 1/100 of a second)***

***\** The weight of all the termites in the world is 10 times heavier than the weight of all the world’s humans put together  *(true)***