

Doubting Thomas: A Community of Belief*

John 20:19-31

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I propose to show when our faith is faltering that it is possible for the worshipping community to carry us along so that we need not despair in our uncertainties.

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good Morning!

*They didn't know then
what we know now.*

For them
the world was flat—
the earth was the center
of the universe--
dragons lived beyond the horizon
and rapid transit
was an angry camel.

*They didn't know then
what we know now.*

They thought he was dead.
That someone
had robbed the grave;
that Mary Magdalene
and the other women were delirious
and in need
of counseling.

*They didn't know then
what we know now.*

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There is a sacred place,
Outside Madison Wisconsin,
Holy Wisdom monastery.
It is a beautiful place
with acres of prairie, rolling hills, and some oak groves.

Its situated across from a state park, and next to a golf course and farm.
 In the winter, when I am frequently there, I can wander through the snow, and fallow fields
 for hours and miles.

I remember making a retreat
 in the midst
 of a difficult period in my life
 --sitting in the chapel
 as the people around me
 chanted evening prayer.

I remember thinking—
 right now
 I don't even have it in me
 to join in their prayers—
 but even as I understood that truth,
 it was also clear to me
 that so many people
 had prayed so regularly
 in that place
 that even though
 I couldn't muster much
 in the way of prayer on my own
 --I didn't need to
 because the place
 was suffused with sacred utterings.
 And I
 could just reach out
 and be carried along
 on the flotsam
 of other people's holy offerings.

I wonder
 if that is what
 Thomas is experiencing.
 From all biblical accounts,
 Thomas is in the room
 when Mary Magdalene
 came running in
 telling the apostles
 of the empty tomb,
 discarded linens,
 more than that
 she has seen the Lord
 and he's alive.

What's a fellow supposed to do
 with **that** information?

He was crucified
and died
and now he's supposed to be alive?

*Thomas, didn't know then
what we know now.*

How could he?
In all seriousness
how could he have believed that?
So he goes out
to wander the city
by himself
to figure things out.
And then it just gets worse.

For when he returns to the upper room
and rejoins his colleagues
they have the audacity
to join in with Mary Magdalene
and claim the impossible,
that Jesus is alive.
In fact, he had stood
where Thomas is standing now.

Thomas, in his sorrow,
simply can't imagine that,
he cannot imagine the impossible.
He says
what any of us would say:
How can I believe THAT?
Show me a sign; I need proof.
Not that he doesn't want to believe,
not that we don't want to believe.
But sometimes our souls
are too empty
our hearts too weary
TO believe.

We have a choice
we can walk out and leave
and say I cannot do this—
I simply do not have it in me
to believe.

Or we can stay,
still unsure,
still worn, weary and sad,

but we can stay and allow ourselves
to be carried along
by the faith of those around us.

Clearly
that's what Thomas did,
the next time we hear of him
it's a full week later,
he's been with the disciples
all this time
with their experience,
their faith, carrying him.

Something of a role reversal
because earlier in the Gospels
Thomas was the
strong, go to kind of guy.
Thomas was the one who said,
as Jesus was contemplating
a dangerous visit to Bethany—
Thomas is the one who said to Jesus—
“Well we'll go with you”.
Turning to his friends,
“We may as well die with him.”

And then later on
the night before he died
Jesus is telling his friends
that he is going to prepare a place for them
and they know where he is going
and they know the way.

And it is Thomas who manages to say
what the rest of them are thinking.
“Uh actually Jesus,
we have no idea where you are going
so we don't know the way.”
Thomas,
a man of convictions and integrity,
he's led the other disciples before—
but now its all different—
they're leading, they're carrying him.

Most of us
at one time or another

have certainly had that experience
 of feeling as if
 everyone else has a tangible sense of God
 and we—
 all we have is our world-weary worn experience
 of just trying to believe. (pause)
Where at other times
 our faith seems strong,
 we know in our center
 that the tomb is empty,
 Jesus is risen,
 and God is real.

There is for me at least,
 a rhythm to this faith business
 —a rhythm of faith and doubt,
 holiness and despair.
 Sometimes doubt plagues me,
 Sometimes an abiding faith sustains me.
 These then
 are two parts to a whole—
 one vastly incomplete without the other.

The beauty is
 that we are not all
 in the same place
 at the same time.
 When some of us doubt
 it's the faith of the others
 that carries us and sustains us.

Just as the disciples carry and sustain Thomas.
 And when our doubt
 gives way to faith again,
 we then carry others.
 So the cycle continues, the ebb and flow
 —and we need not despair
 in our uncertainties
 for part of being
 in a worshipping community
 is that we hold one another's faith
 in our hands.
 You holding me—
 me holding you.
 and this is the faith—
 this is faith of our community, and community of communities.

This is the faith
into which, last Saturday night
in the midst of our Easter vigil, here at the Cathedral we baptized, and received and
confirmed, our siblings in Christ who are taking their next steps in their journeys of faith.

By the waters of baptism
We become part of a faith community
that holds one another,
carries one another,
sustains one another
over and over again.

Embodying that promise
“Will you do all in your power
to support these persons in their life in Christ.
And we reply, “We will with God’s help.”]

For We know now what they knew then.

Alleluia Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.