

“Finding the Easter Way”
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Acts 4:32-35
John 20:19-31

John’s gospel says that the disciples were locked away, on the evening of that first day of the week, out of fear of the Jews. You have to understand something: all the disciples, and Jesus himself, were Jews. So a better understanding of this line would be to say they were afraid of the religious *authorities*. They saw how quickly the crowd had turned against Jesus; they feared they could be next.

And yet, even their locked doors can’t keep the resurrected Christ from showing up among them. But this is no ghost, John’s gospel wants us to know. Jesus shows the disciples his wounds, in his hands, and in his side, where nails were driven into flesh.

Jesus is the word made flesh. Flesh means vulnerability. Flesh means wounds. And wounds are exactly what Thomas needed to see and to feel, before he could believe.¹

John’s gospel mentions several times that Thomas was “the twin.” In fact, the Greek name for Thomas-- Didymus-- means “twin.” However, all those times that the Bible describes Thomas as having a twin, we never see in scripture a time when Thomas’ twin is introduced. Isn’t that strange? Think of the twins you know: in our church, there is Reena and Riya. My best friends in middle school were Kimmie and Kristie, identical twins. And sure, once you knew them for more than a day, you knew their personalities were vastly different. Kristie was the studious one and the athlete. Kimmie did not have the gift for scholarship, but she loved to have fun and take risks. They were pretty much the yin and the yang to one another-- and sometimes I suspected that the fact that people lumped them together all the time pushed them to choose very separate ways from one another.

I suspect that the bible never mentions Thomas’s twin, but instead offers us a mirror, where we can look at Thomas, and see a reflection of ourselves-- as Thomas’ twin. Tied to Thomas, we also yearn to see and to touch, in order to trust and believe. For Thomas, the experience of a virtual Jesus was not enough. He had a deep yearning for the embodied Christ, to touch his hands to the man he loved and gave his life to follow. Aren’t we in the same boat? After a year of virtual worship, after a year of hiding behind masks, we long to see one another in the flesh, close enough to touch each other, and even to examine the wounds that this year of living in a pandemic has brought us.

Although some would judge Thomas for asking, we should probably thank Thomas for asking the question we all probably would have been thinking, but without the courage to ask.

¹ “Three Kinds of Doubt: Salt’s Lectionary Commentary for Easter 2” April 5, 2021 saltproject.org

There is a strong tradition that tells us that Thomas, after witnessing the resurrected Jesus, traveled all the way to India to give testimony to the good news about Jesus and his resurrection. Sometimes, a story well-told can be as convincing as hands touching wounds.

You may not realize it, but *you* have the ability to tell the story of our faith in ways that can help others see and even touch Jesus. Maybe-- most likely-- you have *not* had a direct encounter with the historical Jesus. However, you are here, watching and worshiping, because there is some part of this story that has made a difference in your life. What story is there? Is it a story of welcome? Is it a story of forgiveness, or of shame, overcome? Is it a story of gratitude and praise? Is it a story of shared justice and peace? Is it a story that has somehow saved your life? Is it a story of falling in love with God, and with God's people?

Sharing testimony to these stories can be a way that offers those receiving the story a chance to see and touch the wounds of the resurrected Christ. It may not be easy. A preaching mentor once told me that getting into the pulpit to preach should feel like dying, and then being resurrected. It certainly felt that way my first few tries at preaching. And, although the task of preaching has grown easier over time, there is still a part of me that feels like I am stepping into my death each time I present a story to you-- especially since we started adding the mysteries of filming a virtual service to the message. You may think, "well, I didn't go to seminary! I didn't sign up for this!" The truth is, your telling of the story might have an even more meaningful impact. Even though it is not your profession-- that is, your paid work-- to tell the faith, it is your vocation-- that is, your calling-- to tell and share the faith. It's a story that deserves authenticity. And, no one can tell it quite like you can.

The Acts story tells of how, in the early days after Jesus ascended, the apostles shared their testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and grace was upon them all. The response to such a sharing of story and witness was a sharing of material resources; each person shared to the point that no one had any need. Telling a story of our faith, or showing it by our actions, is helping to pave a way toward Jesus, especially when that way seems mysterious, lost, or just too astonishing to follow.

The early followers of Jesus weren't called Christians. They were simply called followers of "The Way." They were trying to follow in the way of Christ-- but they did not yet know where that way would take them.

Tomorrow will be the anniversary of the date in 1633 when Galileo was brought before the Inquisition, charged with heresy for teaching that the earth followed its way around the sun, and not the other way around. After agreeing to formally recant, he stayed under house arrest for 8 years until his death. But Galileo always maintained that his scientific discovery could coexist with the teachings of Christian faith, and that one day scripture would reveal this to be so. Legend has it that immediately after he recanted, as he rose from kneeling before his inquisitors, Galileo deviantly whispered, "*e pur, si muove*" ("even so, it does move").

For many Christians, finding the path of faith will also involve finding doubt-- even questioning the long-held assumptions of the institutional church. I don't think the book has been yet closed on what God might reveal to us. The way of resurrection, of Easter, to many of us may still be a mystery.

But we do have some clues to help us find the Easter way, the way of resurrection, the way of Christ.

If we are moving from inward focused, locked-up fear, to outer-focused, liberated witness, then we are likely pointed in the right direction of The Way.

If we are moving from retaining of sin, to a place of forgiveness and peace, then we are likely pointed in the right direction of The Way. Finding forgiveness can be hard, especially in today's environment, where we are so easily triggered by the injustices and hatred around us.

If we are moving in the direction of The Way, the Spirit will fill us with her breath. Have you ever tried to hold your breath for long periods of time? Maybe as a swimmer, you hold breath to extend your endurance. Maybe as you take a quick picture in a public place, these days you hold your breath as you remove your mask. Maybe when you are anxious, you simply forget to breathe as you should. Eventually, however, your body gives in-- you can't withhold breath forever and still have life. We have been hearing in the sad testimonies of the trial of Derek Chauvin trial, that George Floyd died because he could not breathe.

When Jesus breathed on the disciples, after telling them twice, "Peace be with you," he was showing them that even after the powers of domination and violence wounded him and took his life, that by the power of the Spirit, he could *breathe* again.

If you find that hard to believe, you aren't alone. It's a story meant to astound you. Take your time, as Thomas did, to feel it out. Connect with your breath, and maybe the Spirit's breath will join yours. Think about what in the story you need, what really saves you-- and consider what story, or testimony-- *you* might tell that might help someone else find the Easter way.