



SERMONS THAT WORK

**Easter 2
Year B**

A Week Late to the Resurrection: Wounded, Stubborn, Alive
[RCL]: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Today, the first Sunday after Easter, is traditionally known as Low Sunday. Low Sunday—that’s a tremendously unflattering nickname for us as the Church. Last week we presented the triumph of the church year. We announced to the world the Good News of Jesus Christ: Jesus died and rose again to new life for love of us. And the result is that the next Sunday is the lowest attendance of the whole church year, all the way across Christendom. Ouch. Was it something we said?

It may well have been. It’s a shocking gospel, frankly quite hard to believe. It was hard to believe even for people who knew Jesus in person while he was alive and witnessed his many miracles. Today we tell the story of Doubting Thomas, the apostle who had to see to believe.

Thomas, along with Peter, is the most human of the disciples, and this story is rich with interesting questions. The first thing that we notice is that Thomas misses out on Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples. It’s Sunday night, and they have been locked in the Upper Room, afraid for their lives since Friday night.

But not Thomas. Where is he? Was he terrified and trying to hide by himself, not wanting to be found by the Romans right in the middle of a pack of ringleaders of Jesus’ rebellion? Was he instead full of stoic courage, the only one brave enough to venture out and bring back food to his friends?

Whatever it was, he was definitely not there when Jesus appeared in the locked Upper Room. He missed the Resurrection. Many of us can identify with that sort of frustrated futility. We wonder if we’re missing the Resurrection in a lot of areas in our lives. God is raising things to new life and our attention is elsewhere, checked out, missing in action, like Thomas.

Thomas does eventually show up with the rest of the disciples, and they tell him, “We have seen the Lord.” And what is he supposed to think? If he was the only one who had been brave enough to leave, he has watched his brothers and friends driven nearly mad with fear and grief over the last three days. He probably feels great compassion and love for them. They so desperately want their dead friend and leader

not to have been condemned to death and executed, that they have dreamed up this vision they experienced.

And who knows, Thomas wouldn't put it past Jesus to come to them as a ghost. Lord knows he did stranger things than that when he was alive. But he is no longer alive. He is dead, and Thomas knows that denying that won't help anyone. It's never brought back any of the rest of the family and friends he's lost over the years, and it won't bring back Jesus.

Thomas remains in this state, unable to trust the word of his friends, for an entire week. What was that week like for him? The rest of the disciples were floating on air knowing that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But where was Jesus for that week? And why did he leave the disciples alone? It's like Low Sunday. Last Sunday we saw him raised from the dead. Now we're back and starting to wonder, did we really see what we thought we saw? At least we have witnessed him alive. Thomas has had only his own stubbornness to keep him going.

Stubbornness and maybe a tiny spark of hope. Because what made Thomas stick around for an entire week with what he believed to be friends driven to delusions by grief? If Jesus was truly dead, there was nothing left for him anymore with this group of people. By all rights, he should have gone home to his fields or his fishing boat. Remaining with the disciples was a dead end—the longer they stayed together, the greater the danger of being arrested by the Romans. And spending time with them would only serve to bring home every minute of every day that their friend Jesus was dead.

But Thomas did stay. Is it possible that a small part of him wondered if this story his friends were telling him might possibly be true? He reveals himself a bit in his answer to their claim that they have seen the Lord. He says, “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.”

He doesn't say, “You people are crazy, I'm leaving.” He sets up a hypothetical condition under which he will believe in the Resurrection. He's laying out the challenge to Jesus. He's saying, “Come and show me, Jesus, come and prove it to me. Just come to me, Jesus, on any terms.”

Thomas wants to be tough and uncaring and skeptical, but he loved Jesus. He is grieving as deeply as the others, and although they are now joyful since seeing him alive again, Thomas has had no such comfort. He's throwing out this challenge to provoke Jesus into coming to them again, because Thomas just wants to see his friend. Ghost or vision or real person, it doesn't matter.

And Jesus does not disappoint him. Thomas has had a grim week, the lone skeptic among the believers. But as soon as Jesus arrives, as soon as he bids them peace, he calls Thomas to him and says, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

How fascinating and revealing that even in his resurrected body, Jesus' wounds remain. And how very appropriate to Thomas' story, and our own story. Resurrection is possible for us in so many areas of our own lives. But our wounds remain, the scars that, painful as they were in the making, have made us indelibly who we are.

Jesus is resurrected to new life, but he's still himself. And he helps Thomas recognize him through his wounds. That is a potent lesson for us. When we look at ourselves and at each other, part of the proof of our true resurrection is that the past is brought forward to coexist with the present. Our wounds are not erased as though they had never existed. They are still present but no longer cause us pain. They are proof to one another that we are new and whole, but it was our woundedness that got us to this day of resurrection in the first place.

There was one other thing that happened on Low Sunday in the early Church. Those who were baptized on Easter received a new white robe and wore it all week. On Low Sunday, they took it off and went back to their regular clothes. There's something very poignant about that and our story of Thomas. Today is the day when the loud and public festivities are over, and we return to our normal, everyday lives. But today is also the Day of the Resurrection for Thomas. It is the day when the new white robe falls away and Thomas sees the wounds on Jesus' body, the same physical person that he knew and loved and now recognizes as both wounded and whole, alive and breathing.

Can we recognize that same type of resurrection in ourselves? In each other? When the fancy Easter dresses and suits are put away for another year, what is left? Our same wounded selves that we fear to show to one another. But we need proof of the Resurrection, and we will only find it in each other. If we are brave enough to show each other our wounded places, we will find that they don't hurt quite so much. We will find that we are indeed both wounded and healed.

Thomas was a week late to the Resurrection, but he made it all the same. Where do you find yourself today? There is still time for you to come back to life. Reach out to touch the wounded, living Jesus and feel him touch your wounded, living soul.

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