

St. Mary's and Trinity Episcopal Churches

April 23rd, 2017

Year A; 2nd Sunday of Easter

Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

John 20: 19-31

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

On this second Sunday of Easter, I must begin this sermon with a question of grammar....as fascinating as that sounds, trust me I have a small but crucial point to make, and then I promise we will move on to Thomas!

If you look at the front of your bulletin you will see this is the 2nd Sunday OF Easter not, as in most other seasons of the church year, the 2nd Sunday AFTER Easter. These small words OF versus AFTER, really do make a difference, as we hear that we are in the second Sunday of Easter we are reminded, of course, that it is still Easter!

The larger world has gone on and Easter is in the rearview mirror, but here in the church, Easter is the center of our faith, and thus worth staying with, for 50 days, for 7 Sundays until we reach the Day of Pentecost on June 4th.

So, for these 7 Sundays OF Easter we will continue to say HE is risen! We will continue to exclaim our alleluias in the service, we will continue with the white hangings on the altar, and for a few more Sundays we will hear stories of that first Easter day.....which takes us from grammar back to Thomas.

Whenever I told the story of Thomas in my ministry at St. Christopher's School, inevitably there was at least one boy named Thomas in the room, and that boy usually sunk down in his seat as this story started, as he understandably did not like the nickname Doubting Thomas.

The first thing we need to know about Thomas is that his nickname is NOT Biblical, the text speaks of his doubts but does not label him forever as a doubter.

In fact, we need to remember that Thomas is, in fact no different from the rest of Jesus's close followers. We need to remember that Mary Magdalene, when seeing Jesus face to face, mistakes him for the gardener and only when he speaks her name, does Mary realize it is Jesus.

Of course, then Mary went back and told the others: "I have seen the Lord." And no one believed her! The men doubted and disregarded Mary's testimony so completely that they hide behind locked doors, fearful that, as they knew Jesus was arrested and killed, so they might be arrested next. Despite Mary's confident testimony all they could know and believe, was fear and hiding.

Only when Jesus appears to them, and shows them his wounds, do they know for themselves that he is raised: "Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

Thus, Thomas when he has missed this appearance of Jesus, is just like all the rest of the disciples, and needs to see Jesus for himself, to see his wounds, to believe that he has indeed been raised. And of course, after Jesus appears to him, Thomas offers a heartfelt proclamation of his faith: "My Lord and my God!"

So, on this 2nd Sunday OF Easter as we continue to more fully absorb the lifechanging power of the resurrection, I want to offer 2 observations on the story of Thomas.

First, we must notice that Thomas misses the first appearance of Jesus because he was not with the others, he was absent, somehow in the horror and desolation that all of Jesus's friends experienced at the crucifixion, Thomas, one of the 12 the text reminds us, Thomas thus, one of those closest to Jesus, had left the others....

And we must recall that as Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, all of his followers there, especially the disciples, they all run away, into the dark of

the night, terrified at being caught, terrified for their friend Jesus, but they all scattered and were lost into the countryside surrounding Jerusalem.

But somehow, they found each other again by the time we join them in this text...on what we know as Easter Sunday, that evening, the disciples have found each other, and found a place to hide together behind locked doors.

Though the others do not believe Mary Magdalene, and though they were fearful and unable to find even a shard of hope on that first Easter Sunday....Despite all of this, the others are together, except for Thomas... he is still scattered and lost and alone.

But after they have seen Jesus, the others go and find Thomas and tell him, and though he cannot believe based on their word, he is thankfully back with them now...no longer desolate and alone.

We as the church as Trinity Church/as St. Mary's Whitechapel....we need to hear and remember these Easter Day experiences of Jesus's friends...We too need to be together, to stay together, and to go looking for each other, when someone is desolate and alone, away from the church.

We like, the disciples do not have nearly all the answers and sometimes all we can do is huddle together, but we are called to be together, and in being together to gain strength and hope, to be ready to see the risen Lord together, to be surprised too by his presence in our midst.

My second observation on this story is simply to note HOW the disciples knew that Jesus was Jesus.....with both the group of disciples, and with Thomas, Jesus is recognized and they are certain this is Jesus in front of them, when he shows them his wounds, in his hands where the nails pierced him, and in his side where the spear of the guard stabbed him. The disciples know it is Jesus by his wounds, by the places of his suffering and pain.

Now if we wrote the story of Jesus based on the world we live in outside the church, the disciples would know Jesus by his golden crown, by his glowing halo, by the magnificent tricks he could perform...the locked doors he could magically pass through....Jesus, if we wrote his story in our world, would be recognizable because of flash and tricks.....and being the biggest and the wealthiest.

But that is not our Lord and Savior....the disciples, and we today, know Jesus by his wounds, by the suffering he experienced, the suffering he endured for the sake of others, for our sake.

And we, Trinity Church, St. Mary's Whitechapel, Jesus's church in this world, can only be recognizable if we do not turn from the wounds of the world....we can only be recognized as Jesus's church as we are clear in knowing that we are called to respond to the suffering world around us.

Where are we called to represent our wounded Savior in this day, in this county, in this world? Where are we called to be vessels of that word Jesus offered to his friends "Peace be with you", where will we be vessels of peace in a hurting world?

I thank God that Easter lasts for 7 Sundays! We have much to hear, to pray on, to discern in this glorious season.

Amen.

The Rev. Megan Limburg