

## Easter 2A; Doubting Thomas

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Ps.16; 1Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

This sermon began by asking parishioners what they noticed about the gospel reading; responses included the breath of Jesus, his words of peace, the showing of wounds confirming death which they had not witnessed, and the willingness to meet Thomas in his need...the preacher acknowledged an interest in the nature of a twin, the willingness of Jesus to meet us in our woundedness in an intimate way and wondered about echoes the text was meant to evoke. The preacher also mentioned a tendency to move too quickly away from the unbelief into a faith proclamation and so decided to include an article written by Garrison Keillor from [www.salon.com/news/opinion/garrison\\_keillor/2008/03/19/easter](http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/garrison_keillor/2008/03/19/easter) that gives weight to remaining in doubt or lack of belief as an honoured place in the faith community.

“There was a small epiphany in church last week when we sang the recessional ‘O Sacred Head, Now Wounded,’ a German chorale in which we basses must jump around more limberly than we may be used to. A tough part compared to ‘When the Roll is Called up Yonder’ and I stood in the rear and struggled with it and then as the choir recessed down the main aisle and came up and stood in the side aisles, three basses wound up standing near me, like border collies alongside the lost sheep, and I got myself in their draft and we sang our way to the barn. (Moral: Get with the group – just make sure it’s the right one.)

I came to church as a pagan this year, though wearing a Christian suit and a white shirt, and sat in a rear pew with my sandy-haired gap-toothed daughter whom I would like to see grow up in the love of the Lord, and there I was, a skeptic in the henhouse, thinking weaselish thoughts. This often happens around Easter. God, in his humorous way, sometimes schedules high holy days for a time when your faith is at low tide, a mud flat strewn with newspapers and children’s beach toys, and while everyone else is all joyful and shiny among the lilies and praising up a storm, there you are, snarfling and grumbling. Which happened to me this year. God knows all about it so I may as well tell you. Holy Week is a good time to face up to the question: do we really believe in that story or do we just like to hang out with nice people and listen to organ music? There are advantages, after all, to being in the neighbourhood of people who love their neighbours. If your car won’t start on a cold morning, you’ve got friends.

A year or so ago, I sat down and read the four Gospels in one fell swoop and somehow the jaggedness of some of it shook my faith, which maybe was based more on visuals – Jesus tending His flock, and little children gathered at His knee, sunbeams bursting through storm clouds and so forth – and then I read about how the early Church cobbled the Scriptures together, which has to raise doubts in anyone’s mind. The Jews got stone tablets and the Mormons arranged for an angel to bring them their holy text, but ours was hammered out through a long contentious political process, sort of like the tax code, and that’s something you don’t care to know more about. I don’t doubt God’s existence – there He is – but I doubt His interest in us right now and I haven’t the faintest idea what He wants from me.

So I sat and felt miserable. And then we had to chant the Psalm, which went, “I am in trouble, my life is wasted with grief and my years with sighing.” Oh boy. David really gets into the blues, he is the Howlin’

Wolf of the Chosen, and when he sings, "I have become a reproach even to my neighbours, a dismay to those of my acquaintance, when they see me in the street they avoid me, " I know the feeling. The leper. The unbeliever. And that's how I felt when my fellow basses came up alongside and we put our backs to it and sang.

There is comfort for the doubter in the Passion story. You are not alone. Jesus' cry from the cross was a cry of incredulity. The apostle denied even knowing Jesus three times. The guy spent years with Jesus, saw the miracles up close, the raising of Lazarus, the demons cast out, the sick healed, the water-walking trick, all of the special effects but when the cards were down, he said, "Who? Me? No way."

He repented. I would too, but not quite yet.

Scepticism is a stimulant, not to be repressed. It is an antidote to smugness and the great glow of satisfaction one gains from being right. You know the self-righteous – I've been one myself – the little extra topspin they put on the truth, their ostentatious modesty, the pleasure they take in being beautifully modulated and cool and correct when others are falling apart. Jesus was rougher on those people than He was on the adulterers and prostitutes.

So I will sit in the doubter's chair for a while and see what is to be learned back there."

It is more than okay to take that place for however long it takes. We are an Easter people in a Good Friday world, someone has said. And sometimes we doubt the reality of Jesus' resurrection and the reality of resurrection in the world. Julian of Norwich imagines the wounds of Jesus as open places where the pain of the world is exposed for its ultimate healing. We need to move into the places where the scars of life and even its new wounds can be transformed. But it may take us some time to not doubt that that is possible.

Where do you long for resurrection? What places in the world, this nation, this community need the witness, the conversion of the Thomas in us? The disciples risked resurrection in themselves, not waiting until the end of their lives; even Thomas moved along eventually. When Jesus was dealing with Martha and Mary at Lazarus' tomb he told them that to know and believe in him means resurrection life here and now.

May God Easter in us all. Easter as a verb. Eastering our faith. Amen.

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