

Here we are on the Sunday after Easter and as may know, every year, on this Sunday we have the story of Thomas, or "Doubting Thomas," as we often refer to him,

Last Sunday, we celebrated the joy of Easter faith.

This week, we're already back to the story about one of Jesus' disciples and his struggle with faith.

Our Gospel for today takes us right back to the first day of the week.

It was Sunday, just a few days after Jesus was arrested, given the death penalty and executed on a cross.

All of his disciples were terrified.

They didn't know what would happen next.

They huddled together in the room where they had shared their last meal with Jesus, fearing any moment that someone would burst through the door and take them away to a similar fate.

Then, strange things started to happen.

Mary and Peter and John all went to the tomb and found Jesus' body was missing.

Peter and John came back and reported the incident to the others...

and pretty soon Mary come bursting in saying that she had both seen and spoken with Jesus.

He wasn't in the tomb, he was alive!

Now this should've been good news. Strangely, it only made them more afraid.

But then suddenly, as they sat together immobilized by their fear, Jesus was with them.

At first they were so frightened they didn't know what to do

and when they finally realized it was him

they were so happy they were still at a loss for words.

Jesus spoke and calmed them. And then he said to them:

"Listen, as the Father has sent me, so I send you."

When he said this, he breathed on them and said to them,

"Receive the Holy Spirit."

"Proclaim the forgiveness of sins...

and yet, retain the sins of those who remain hard-hearted."

Share with the world, the peace I have given you.

And with these words, the world of the disciples was changed for ever.
But Thomas wasn't with them.

We aren't told where Thomas was during this first visit.
Maybe he had left to find a private place, a place to sort everything out
and try to make sense of all that had just happened.
But whatever the reason, Thomas wasn't there.

When he returned, the disciples told him everything that had happened.
But Thomas wasn't able to see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands.
He didn't have the marvelous opportunity of looking into Jesus' eyes.
So he did the same thing that anyone of us might have done.

He said, "I'm sorry, but I just can't believe it.
Until I see his hands and his side. Until I touch them,
I won't believe a word you're saying."

A week and a day later they were all together again.
Same place. Same group.
But, this time, Thomas was with them.

And again Jesus appeared. He greeted them and then Jesus walked straight up to
Thomas. He took Thomas' hands into his own and he said,
"Thomas, feel the warmth of my hands. Touch my wounds.

Its time for you to believe. You don't have to be afraid anymore.

Thomas responded immediately.
He fell down in front of Jesus and he dared to speak what before... he was afraid to
believe. You might even say he made a public affirmation of his faith.
He said it simply, "My Lord and my God."

But, wrapped up in this confession of faith, Thomas might've also been saying:
"Jesus this world is a broken place.
There are so many things that frighten me and confuse me.
But today Jesus, I'm taking a chance.

In the midst of all this brokenness, I'm going to dare to believe that what you have said
is true. I am going to dare to entrust my life to you above all other things.
What else can I do. "You are my Lord and my God."

Thomas, has seen, and he now believes. Jesus accepts this confession.

But, at the same time, Jesus proclaims a blessing on all those to come,
all those who don't have the benefit Thomas did, of seeing Jesus,
and yet will believe, people who will face many obstacles to faith... many trying times

people who hold on to faith... even in the midst of doubt...people like you and me.

Philip Melancthon, one of Martin Luther's friends said,
 "It isn't enough to know that Jesus is my savior. I must know that he is the Savior for me."

The world we live in is almost as broken as Thomas' was... maybe more so.

In our world, like Thomas' people we love die, sometimes suddenly.

Earthquakes and tornadoes strike.

Property is damaged and sometimes lives are lost.

It's a broken world we live in.

One day all is well, and the next day, there can be a terrible loss.

We feel that prominently this morning as we remember and pray for the Warren family and their congregation.

Yet in midst of all this brokenness, we are called to follow Jesus and respond in faith.

And like Thomas, we often begin our journey of faith, by looking for a sign.

We will not see Jesus' hands and side,

but we have the need to see God's love, alive in human flesh...

God's love made real.

The liberators of the Warsaw Ghetto, in Poland
 found these words written on the walls of a dark room.

I believe in the sun, even if it does not shine

I believe in Love, even if I do not feel it.

I believe in God, even If I do not see Him.'

I believe in God because I have been touched by God through the hands of my brothers and sisters in faith.

Harry Fosdick was a pastor at Riverside Church in New York City.

He tells the story of a man who came to him and asked to join the church.

The man said that he joined with a good deal of apprehension and doubt.

He said,

"I am not even sure what I think about God, but I should like to work out my spiritual faith inside the Christian fellowship, not outside."

After living in the midst of that church for three years
 the man came in and spoke to Fosdick. He said,

"No words can estimate what this has meant to me; each year clearer insights, deeper assurance, and life more and more worthwhile."

Fosdick gladly accepted the man with doubts and all because he knew that we all have our doubts...
...and that, only when we join together in a caring community a community of faith, can we grow in the midst of those doubts.

As each of you continue to seek out who Jesus is, just as Thomas did, my prayer for you,
is that you would hold on to this community of faith...
...that you would seek out a trusted Christian friend, or small group,

and above all, that through God's Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit the love of God in Christ,
would be made real to you in a new way. Amen.

ⁱ *An inscription on a wall of the Warsaw Ghetto by an unknown Jew, circa 1942 to hope against a hope is still a form of hoping.*