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May 15, 2022

Where you are

John 20:19-31

Welcome to Sunday!

Praise be to the risen God.

There is this beautiful warmth to the Sunday after Easter.

We've just been reminded of the Empty tomb, we have smelled the lilies

We read the stories, we sang the songs.

We have celebrated, once again, that Christ is risen.

However in the book of John, we enter the reality of one who does not yet know.

A week after the crucifixion, Thomas is still lost.

He is trapped in the reality that Jesus his rabbi, Jesus his friend,

Has died:

An innocent man, victim to a gruesome, terrifying death.

Thomas is still very much existing in the reality of that pre-Easter Saturday

When Christ lay in a tomb, and hope seemed to have died with him.

Now, in this moment, I ask you to pause the story. Don't rush ahead.

Sit for a moment with Thomas in his darkness.

Do you feel his fear?

He has heard rumors of the risen Christ, but is grappling with his certainty that the world just doesn't work that way.

Can you feel the weight of his grief?

We forget sometimes the reality of the experience of these disciples.

They didn't know they were waiting for a resurrection.

Jesus their rabbi, Jesus their friend was dead for days.

The empty nights of uncertainty

The darkness of confusion

They didn't read about it, they lived it.

And for Thomas...

For Thomas, it had been a week.

Though rumors of Jesus's resurrection had begun to circulate, for Thomas there had been no sign. The others shared their accounts, the women told the story of an empty tomb...

But Thomas needed proof.

What could he have thought when the others told him “we have seen the Lord”

Can you taste his doubt?

Can you feel his drowning isolation?

Because doubt can be isolating.

We sit in our churches, we read our Bibles, we sing our songs, we hear the witness of our friends, and yet sometimes...

What can we do with the shame of a secret seed of doubt?

What can we do in that isolation?

Perhaps, like Tomas, we surround ourselves, seeking the comfort of our friends - of those who believe - of those who will love us through our wrestlings. Those who remind us that, even in the depth of our isolation, we are not actually alone.

Surrounded by the support of the faithful, we wait for the hope of our risen Savior to once again enter our reality.

Now, let us enter back into the story.

“A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (26-27).

There’s a beautiful bookending here. A parallel between the story Thomas had heard from the other disciples and the experience that God brought specifically into Thomas’ darkest isolation.

Jesus his rabbi, Jesus his friend, Jesus the risen Lord walked through the door and met Thomas’ doubt head on, not with wrathful anger and not with shaking fists, but with open hands and willing vulnerability.

Jesus came to his friend in exactly the way Thomas needed him most desperately in that moment.

“And then Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God!” (28)

The embrace of that moment, the shedding of the weight of Thomas’ grief

The redemption of his sorrow and his doubt. In that moment, Jesus opens his arms to Thomas and Thomas is able to be fully met by the God who did not give up on him because he doubted - the God for whom Thomas’ walls of isolation, grief, and doubt were no match.

Legend has it that it was Thomas who later brought Christianity to India.

You see, even though he had wrestled with doubt, he was not left to the mire.

Although he had wrestled with faith, Jesus found him where he was, and pulled him through. And that trajectory helped change the world.

Now it may seem strange, the Sunday after Easter, to hear a story about doubt. It may be uncomfortable after the joyful exuberance of Easter, to have the light cast once again on isolation and grief.

But the story of Thomas brings us the reassurance that regardless of where we are on this journey with Jesus, whether we are eagerly examining resurrected wounds, or too afraid to take that extended hand, even if we have built up walls so thick we fear we are completely lost behind them, Jesus is faithful to find us in our darkest places. Jesus is forever faithful, even when we just aren't sure.

Author and theologian, Anne Lamont explains her wrestlings with doubt in this way:

“My coming to faith did not start with a leap but rather a series of staggers from what seemed like one safe place to another.

Like lily pads, round and green, these places summoned and then held me up while I grew. Each prepared me for the next leaf on which I would land, and in this way I moved across the swamp of doubt and fear.

I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything.

I remembered something Father Tom had told me—that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.”

I don't know where you are today. Perhaps you are basking in the full delight and joy of the empty tomb. Perhaps you have run ahead with the women, and are letting everyone else know that the tomb is empty and that hope is here.

But maybe, maybe you're still sitting in a dark room with Thomas, too hurt by what you have seen, too afraid to hope. Too closed to open your heart quite that much.

Not yet ready to jump to that next landing leaf for fear of being swallowed by the swamp.

If that's you today - continue in those moments of wrestling to surround yourself with those whose faith can hold you up even as yours is waning.

Continue to seek Jesus your rabbi, Jesus your friend, Jesus the risen Lord.

And know, that even in the darkness of your doubt, God is faithful to bring the light of love to where you are.

And once, though Christ, you have navigated through that darkness, you can use your story as an honest expression faith: to speak hope for those who are still wrestling. By your witness, you can become for them the ones who hold them up and remind them that they are not alone, that God is faithful, that they are not forgotten.

There is one last promise in this section. And it's for all of us:

Jesus knew how hard it would be to hold onto hope as we sit in our dark rooms.

And so, he spoke this blessing. Receive it now:

“Blessed are those who have believed without seeing” (29).

Blessed are you. Blessed are you who reach back and take the hand of the risen savior. And blessed are you who wrestle with doubt.

Hear the promise of God’s faithfulness:

God has not forgotten you.

God has not abandoned you to the darkness.

God will meet you where you are.