

WELCOME 8 April 2018 2 Easter '18 B

John 20:24-31

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get to know one another better...today is the 2nd Sunday of Easter...you heard that right...Easter, like Christmas is not a day but a season...maybe someone needs to write a song about the 50 days of Easter? Or Paul could just write us a limerick.

Sometimes you just have to touch it to know...Is that paint really wet? Is that pan hot enough to cook in? Does this person really care?

Hearing is the last sense we lose before we die...but touch is the next last...

We touch to reassure. We hold to comfort. We embrace in love.

Thomas was not the first & likely not the last to want to touch Jesus. On Easter morning Jesus told Mary, *"Do not hold on to me."* So Thomas' request is not unusual And his desire was not denied: *"Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"*

To touch & be touched by the risen Jesus is to receive the assurance of his love, the embrace of his salvation, & the firm grip of his presence now and in every circumstance of your life. The only way to finally make sense of Easter is to experience the "touch of Easter" *so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.*

We will experience & explore that together today.

LWKids is ON! Philippa & Leonie will lead our youngest disciples out to the verandah during the next song medley.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

2 Easter '18 B – MAKING SENSE OF EASTER: THE TOUCH OF EASTER

FAITH CHAT: 1. What do you do when you have doubts or questions of faith?

BIBLES

2. Has God ever caused you to change your behavior/thinking/ faith? What was that like?

Serene Jones (1st woman pres of Union Theol. Sem in NYC) in a devotional resource for pastors, “Of all the characters Jesus meets after the resurrection, none has left a stronger mark on the imagination of Western Christianity than Thomas. He is the incredulous nonbeliever who hides inside every believing Christian – the questioner in us that resists easy answers to hard questions of faith, who always wants a little more proof.” Can I get an “amen”? Thomas is every one of us who has prayed our guts out for a loved one & not received the answer for which we prayed. Thomas is every one of us who has had our hopes hammered...dreams destroyed...relationships ruined & looked to God & said, “Really? This?” Thomas is every parent who has cried themselves blind for their kid to no notable result. Thomas is every husband/wife staring at the dark ceiling of their bedroom saying, “God we are trying...but this marriage is in flames.” Thomas is the single mom who goes to work every day & the debt monster swallows it all...

Thomas' doubt/disbelief is not to be confused with "unfaith." Unfaith is that broken state of sinful human life which refuses to recognize that life has meaning. Unfaith says my life/your life/the existence of the world has no meaning/purpose/goal/direction. One day follows simply another like random cars on the highway. Earthquake? Fire? Bomb blast? Birth? Death...It happens. Just let me get mine...That's unfaith.

Thomas' demand for an audience with Jesus is in fact just the opposite. Thomas places the responsibility for meaning/purpose/hope back in Jesus' lap where he had placed it when he first was drawn to follow Jesus. Thomas had been with Jesus from the beginning. He knew Jesus' teaching wasn't pointless – Jesus' life wasn't insignificant – Jesus' love wasn't irrelevant – Jesus' death wasn't unimportant. Thomas had seen the miracles, feedings, healings, dead restored to life...He knew that meant something. He knew Jesus promised more...So if Jesus was raised from death that too must have meaning/mattered. And Thomas wants in.

For 8 days all around him his friends have been bubbling to the boil-over with stories about Jesus being raised from the dead, but Thomas has yet to see for himself. His closest friends have told him the good news of the empty tomb, but Thomas hasn't seen proof. He's heard from Mary & the other women, Peter/John, (maybe even the duo from Emmaus) & he wants the experience they have had.

I think Thomas speaks for generations of people, Christian & not-yet-Christian alike who are longing for that intimate personal contact with Jesus that blows the dust out of their minds & the cobwebs from their hearts & puts life back into their lives. Thomas gives voice to every “wonderer” who is open to the idea of a God who loves them, but simply needs 1-to-1 experience with Jesus. Thomas is the spokesman for a lot of people who aren't antagonistic or even skeptical about issues of faith; they just have had too many disappointments, too many seemingly unanswered prayers, too many hurts, seen too much hurtful stuff from those who claim to follow Jesus...

(1 in 29 Aussies do not know the whole story of Jesus & about 1 in 4 are open to the conversation) Thomas is those folks...he wants it to be true & he wants it to be true for him.

He just wanted to be with & touch & experience the risen Jesus. It had been bad enough when Jesus was taken from him in that heartbreaking string of days, Thursday...Friday...Saturday. But for Jesus to have appeared to others & Thomas to still experience his absence...that's too much....he's hungry – longing – empty of the Jesus he'd grown to know & love & Thomas wants that back. Thomas knows what we know...every relationship that matters is experienced/tangible/felt. Social media lies saying the internet is real & “friends/followers/likes” are real...They're not.

And it is right there that the good news begins to be real for Thomas...for us. His doubts are ok & acceptable within the company of the other disciples. Note well that Thomas' doubt/disbelief - insistence for more evidence does not place him at a distance from the disciples' fellowship. It doesn't make him an outcast. Peter, James & John don't show him the door. Lack of understanding seemed to characterize the 12 while Jesus was among them. They rarely "got it" while Jesus was teaching, & that was ok. Here, Thomas asks for the same evidence (see/touch Jesus' wounds) the others were privileged to see, & he is not ostracized for his request. Doubts/questions are ok within the company of the believers.

And let's be serious...what's up with the other 10 still hanging out behind locked doors? If the resurrection is such a big deal, such a life changing event, why are they still stuck in the same place? What difference has the empty tomb made for them? They are in the same house behind the same locked doors as a week ago...I always picture Jesus not just appearing on their side of the door, but kicking it down & slapping them all with his thong... But instead...in the love that called them from their fishing boats & tax-collector's booths to teach them to fish for people, Jesus now continues his work in their lives to imbed deeply in their hearts the profound unyielding love of God for each part of his lost creation. In

the love that gathered them from the fringes of their society & placed the square in the middle of God's plan to restore all things to himself, Jesus comes to them to plant in the very depths of their souls the relentless love of God for his sinful creatures.

Thomas wants what we all want...a touch, a sign, a word directly to him/us. And he gets it...Jesus comes directly to Thomas to reassure him that he has not been forgotten in his grief – to remind Thomas that he too is still loved & cherished – to say very clearly that Thomas' hurts can be healed & his heart lovingly made whole. Jesus comes to tend his battered sheep. The Good Shepherd is not willing for even one to be lost, but comes to do whatever is necessary to find that lamb & restore it to the flock. He makes another visit to the locked room in order for Thomas to have the opportunity to see & believe.

It really is that simple...he hears our cries of desperation...he seeks to soothe our deepest longings for his presence & power in our lives...Jesus will leave no child of his completely alone who calls out for his help. To those who doubt, who don't yet believe Jesus grants his presence in measure equal to their need. While not all of us receive the physical signs Thomas requested, we each receive what is needed. Jesus is the one who seeks us where we are & is never willing to write anyone off as a lost cause. There is no lecture, no berating Thomas for not believing what everyone else reported. Just acceptance and grace...as for the other 10...as for you/me.

Dr. Jones concludes her devotion...“When doubt crowds out hope, we can be confident that Jesus will come to us where we are, even if it is out on the far edge of faith that has forgotten how to believe. What a strange thing to hold on to – this certainty that answers to our most profound & desperate questions about life come not because we seek them with focused determination but because God comes seeking us, stepping through the walls that hardship builds around us, offering love at the very moment that grace seems nothing but a farcical ghost story told by not-to-be-believed friends.”

The point is Jesus offers himself, over & over again, to people who long to see him. With no questions asked, Jesus offers himself & gives the repeated gift of his presence & his peace. He never lectured the disciples for hiding behind closed doors even after they had received the Spirit, nor did he censure Thomas for wanting a tactile experience of the risen Lord.

The disciples don't deserve a second visit by Jesus, but they get one. Jesus comes, and comes again, to his trembling disciples. Week after week, he shows up in the space of fear & doubt & stretches out his wounded hands, full of mercy, to invite them to believe...just like today...Really.

Jesus comes again & again through the Word (witness of those who believe) - through his people/body/church - through his meal...the bread & wine of Communion...through his promised gift of the Holy Spirit...Jesus comes to us with a personal word – his special touch for our lives so that we may believe & have life in his name.

AND...AND...For those of us who live on this side of Easter & still have not “seen,” who still long to “touch” the reality of Jesus love & life...Jesus leaves his Spirit & the witness of others to draw us out to the world the way he came to his first followers to draw them out from behind their locked doors, out from the midst of their fears, out from their own sinfulness, out of their doubts & into the world to share his love & declare what they knew, that Jesus was alive...that death was destroyed...that sin was forgiven...that the powers of evil were wiped out & that life indestructible & abundant was free & for all.

And for Thomas that must have been enough...Why? Do you know how the church records the rest of Thomas' story? Early church history says Thomas died in India. He was the apostle to the people of India. He brought the gospel of Christ to India. He died a martyr after he was run through with five spears by five soldiers. That doesn't sound much like a doubter, does it? It sounds like someone for whom the resurrection of Christ was real, someone for whom the empty tomb made a difference, someone who received from Jesus just what was needed for him to be sent as the Father sent the Son...

To touch & be touched by the risen Jesus is to receive the assurance of his love, the embrace of his salvation, & the firm grip of his presence now and in every circumstance of your life...so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

Let's pray...Self-giving God, risen Christ, and blowing Holy Spirit, be with us not just today but always. Speak your word of triumph into our lives & breathe your power into our hearts. By your hand upon us, free us from ourselves, our doubts and our fears so we might boldly represent you & offer your eternal life & glorious peace to the world. Amen.