

## EASTER II

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." John 20:25*

In just a few moments we will welcome Jessica Elizabeth Young-Paulson and Anderson James Rivkin-McSwain into the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. This is always a joyful occasion for us here at St John's, and baptisms are especially fitting during the season of Easter.

It's also what we in the business call Low Sunday – the Sunday after Easter, when attendance commonly falls off from the high holiday. And it's Thomas Sunday as well, the Sunday featuring one of my favorite Gospel characters – Doubting Thomas, or Honest Thomas, or Thomas the Twin, as he is popularly known.

Low Sunday is often a day clergy take off, after the rigors of Lent and Holy Week, and sometimes I'm gone myself. But since I'm leaving for sabbatical in two weeks, here I am! And I'm glad to be here, not only for the baptisms, which I love, but because I enjoy the opportunity to reflect about Thomas – a chance I miss if I'm off church.

Thomas was not with the disciples when they had their previous experience of the Resurrected Jesus – that time we hear about in the locked room where Jesus came and stood among them. Where was Thomas? We don't know – but anyway, he was elsewhere, and missed the vivid presence of Jesus. I said in last week's sermon that when Jesus comes into the disciples' lives originally, he becomes for them *some part of them that didn't even exist before ... He gives a new dimension to their identity, their sense of themselves and their sense of possibility. He creates something new in the history of human understanding, human faith, human hope.*

And then I said, *when Jesus is executed, all the disciples seem to lose that part of themselves for a while. But then, again, What the Resurrection means, whatever else it means – the Resurrection means that Jesus'*

*followers find again in themselves that part of themselves that hadn't existed before Jesus. They locate again that dimension, that understanding, faith, and hope. They recover their sense of possibility.*

Well, Thomas hasn't yet had that experience, that recovery. For whatever reason, his understanding of the Resurrection lags behind that of his fellow disciples, and even farther behind that of the faithful women who are the first witnesses. And he needs a different kind of evidence, as well. He needs to touch Jesus, to feel his wounds. We might say today that Thomas has a different learning style from the other disciples. Or we might say that he has lacked a group experience of vision, insight, revelation, or however we might style what happens to that group in the locked room. Thomas has to do it his way.

I'm always fascinated to notice and to contrast what the Gospelists have Jesus say and what they have him do. The words they put into Jesus' mouth – particularly John's words, are familiar often to the point of banality, they are pious or at least have been quoted to pious ends, they frequently imply – or are inferred to mean - judgment, and they ring in my ears, often, as abstract and pedantic. Here, for example, John has Jesus say to Thomas, *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*

Well okay, I get it. John is assuring his audience of believers, decades after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, that they too are blessed, even though they have not seen Jesus with their own eyes. Or that, if they come to believe, they will be blessed. So we can read that as an assurance to ourselves, as well. If we believe in the Risen Christ, here, now, today, we too can be blessed.

That's what John has Jesus *say*. But that's not what he has Jesus *do*. What he has Jesus do is invite Thomas to do it his way: *you need to touch me, touch me. Go ahead.*

And Thomas does, he does it his way. Thomas - late, stubborn, and tactile. And Thomas believes. And that's okay. That's what John seems to illustrate here. We have various ways of coming to an understanding of the Resurrection, and that's okay.

Or maybe we have no way of understanding the Resurrection, and that's probably okay too. Those of us who studied Jim Adams' book *So You Think You're Not Religious* during Lent read his theory that Jesus actually had little use for "faith" insofar as it means belief, adherence to creed or dogma. Adams claims that Jesus calls his disciples "you of little faith" as a term of endearment, of intimacy. In his reading, Jesus surrounds himself with skeptics, with questioners, with individuals who do not march to the common beat. And even when they don't march to the beat *Jesus himself* is trying to establish, he keeps them around, keeps confiding in them, keeps sending them out to preach the Good News of God's dominion.

What Jesus *does*, often, is so much more radical and quirky and inclusive than what the Gospel writers have him say. I find him much more appealing and inspirational as an actor, mostly, than I do as a lecturer. Perhaps that's because I'm an activist myself, although I'm also a writer. Perhaps it's because Jesus' words, far more than his actions, have been used as weapons, as instruments of punishment, exclusion, and judgment rather than as invitations, signs of welcome and embrace.

Whatever. It seems to me that the sum of Jesus' actions is illustrated succinctly here in this story about Thomas. Thomas comes to Jesus – comes back to Jesus, late, reluctantly, and skeptically. He has been burned by Jesus' death and disappearance and he is, as we say, *twice shy*. But that's all right by Jesus, who does not demand uniformity from his followers. *Come at your own pace*, he seems to indicate, *come in your own way. But come, all of you, come.*

And that's the invitation we extend, now, to Jesse and to Anderson. Who knows what their journeys of faith may hold? Who can see, or tell? But what we say to them, in the name of Jesus, is *Come at your own pace, come in your own way. But come, all of you, come.*

Alleluia! Alleluia ! Amen