

## EASTER II

*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.’* John 20: 27-8

On Easter Sunday, we left Jesus outside his tomb with Mary Magdalene. We left him telling her, *‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to God.’*

Today, a week later in our time, and a week later in John’s Gospel time, we have him appearing, for the second time, to the disciples, in a locked room, telling Thomas the Twin, Thomas the Doubter, *Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.’*

*Don’t hold me. Touch me. Don’t hold on to me. Touch me.*

Last Monday I suffered a terrible post-Resurrection crash. I’d gone up to Portland after church and brunch here, to celebrate Easter with my daughter and granddaughter. We had a lovely afternoon and evening, and then, just as Liz and I were off to bed, we had a brief interchange that hurt me – hurt me more than I’d realized till I awoke from a bad, sad, dream about the transaction. The details don’t matter, but it was reproach, a rebuff, and I spent Monday in a terrible mood.

Now, post-Easter blues and fatigue are unsurprising for a priest, and I was surprised not at the mood itself but at its intensity. Of course, we parents are incredibly vulnerable to our children. But my daughter and I have a close and loving relationship, something that’s we’ve both worked hard to achieve, and these occasional regressions to what feels like adolescent push-me-pull-you moments are startling and hurtful to me. On Monday, I felt like Mary in the garden, when Jesus tells her, *Don’t hold on to me.*

*Don’t hold me. Touch me. Don’t hold on to me. Touch me.*

What are we to make of Jesus’ very different responses to Mary and Thomas? Why does he reject her loving gesture of embrace, and yet encourage Thomas to plunge his hand into Jesus’ open wounds?

On Tuesday, I will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. As this date approaches every year I take time to reflect on the meaning of my vocation, and 25 years is a milestone indeed. Then on Thursday I'll turn 65. Another milestone.

As I meditated about my years of ministry, so many of them in this beloved community, I thought also about Jesus' words in these recent Gospels: *Don't hold me. Touch me. Don't hold on to me. Touch me.*

I conclude that Jesus' varying responses to Mary and Thomas reflect their varying needs— and his needs, as well. With Mary, Jesus needs to detach himself, I believe, from the very human comfort and touch she's offered in the past. He needs to move on; he has other business to attend to. And she needs to move on, as well. She needs to understand that everything is different now. *Don't hold on to me.*

A week later, Jesus needs to convince Thomas that something amazing has happened. He needs Thomas to believe in the Resurrection, so that Thomas can continue his work of spreading the Gospel throughout the world. And Thomas is a concrete thinker. He needs to touch and feel in order to see and believe. *Touch me. Touch me.*

I've been thinking about my vocation — how it's played itself out— in terms of these two transactions. And I guess, today, if I had to sum up my ministry in a sentence or two it would be what Jesus tells Thomas, *Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.*

I say this not because I think I've been crucified. I've had, in most ways, an incredibly blessed and privileged life. But life has happened to me, as it has to all of us. My ability to speak openly about my reversals, my failures and failings, my temptations, and my suffering, is what people speak of most often when they express gratitude for my priesthood. Apparently, my invitation, *Touch me*, has touched them. Has touched those who yearn to be touched. Has touched you.

This gift of personal openness has led me from the beginning. I remember thinking, early my discernment process, *If I can tell my stories, if I can be frank about the darkness in my own life, if by doing so I can assure*

*other wounded people that God loves them as I know God loves me, that is my calling.*

And so I have done, or so I have tried to do. *Touch me. Touch me.*

But then there's that other calling, the one Jesus expressed to Mary. *Don't hold on to me.* I think of how I've had to understand my calling as so different from the models and molds I'd grown up with, and that other people expected of me. Everything from my LGBT activism to my earrings has been challenged and condemned by those who find me unseemly and unpriestly, and I've had to battle stereotypes – my own and others, in order to find my own way. *Don't hold on to me.*

In the end, I find I can't separate these two aspects of my vocation, my ministry. I believe Jesus is saying to Mary, *I am not any longer who you think I am. If you were to embrace me, you would not be holding who I am now. Stand back, and see the real Jesus, the Jesus now. Don't hold on to me. Don't hold on to your old idea of me. We have new work to do.*

And I think that's been part of what I've been saying in my ministry: *Don't hold on to me. Don't hold on to your old idea of me, or of the priesthood. We have new work to do.*

But I've also been saying, *Touch me. See who I really am. See that I am a beloved child of God. See that you are too.*

This paradoxical ministry is not just mine. It is ours. You touch me as I touch you. We hold each other, and we let each other go, as need demands. Together we have made a community where we offer one another, and, I hope all those who enter here, the chance to touch our wounds and be touched, be healed, be loved. And where we do not hold on desperately or rigidly to old ideas, where we have new work to do.

***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.'***

*Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen*

