

THE HOPE OF THOMAS

4/19/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (Livestream)
Easter 2 (Year A): Psalm 16; 1Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31 (CEB)

So...are any of you dealing with extra family conflicts while you're all at home Staying Safe? Have some of you been accused of being "argumentative"? The first time I remember being called "argumentative" was by my favorite teacher in the 6th grade. Now, this was way-back before online learning...Zoom wasn't even invented yet! And, I was devastated.

I would've never argued with Miss Brooks, just for the sake of arguing, so I wanted to respond, "I'm not argumentative!" But I realized that would only make me seem more argumentative!

What I've come to realize is I'm not so much argumentative, as I am a "literalist." For instance, one time,—wayyyy back in the days when we used to eat out at restaurants—after I'd quizzed my friend about the café we were headed to, like the hours of operation, the days they were open, etc., she accused me of having "trust issues."

I trusted her; I just wanted to be sure the restaurant was going to be open when we got there! Maybe that's why I relate to Thomas so well. In my opinion, he's completely misunderstood as, "doubting Thomas." The other disciples had already seen the Risen Christ, but he wasn't there. Wouldn't most of us have responded similarly: "Really? Jesus is alive? Then let me see him; let me touch the holes in his side!"

This literal side of our selves can be hard to control; it just wants to keep asking questions until, everything's clarified. We don't do this to prove a point, or so that the people around us know we're right; we do it because the more facts we have, the better we think we'll feel.

Unfortunately, in times like these—in times like the days after the resurrection—when everything known as "normal" is completely turned upside down, all the facts in the world can't erase our fears!

At the same time, we're Christians, so we live in a world of metaphors; a world of mystery filled with rituals and sacraments. What I've realized on my own faith journey is that the more I'm able to let go of the need for more facts, the better I'm able to be present to the mystery, and the deeper my relationship with Christ grows.

And here's the thing. Although Thomas asked to see the nail marks and to put his hand in the side of Jesus, the account in John's Gospel doesn't indicate Thomas actually did that when Jesus arrived. Instead, we're told that Thomas believes upon hearing Jesus call his name. This so-called doubter is transformed as he is heard and seen by the risen Christ.

So, Thomas gives me hope, because when I'm feeling like I'm just a big fat doubter, I remember that God provides Thomas—as well as us—plenty of opportunities to improve the ability to recognize the face of the risen Christ. To be known by God is to be loved by God, so as we learn to recognize the face of the risen Christ in others, we enter more deeply into relationship with God.

This morning's passage from John also includes a sending—that is Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples, so that they will be prepared to share the Good News with the world. That's what we're called to do—to share the Good News—and we do that by acknowledging that God's offer of abundant life is founded in relationships.

So, this week, as we go about what are now our new daily routines—whether on a Zoom call, in a grocery check-out line wearing a mask, or in our own homes—may we each, more often, recognize the face of the risen Christ in each other, so that we're more able to share God's love with those we encounter.

-AMEN