

## **Sermon 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter by Ron Kolanowski 4-11-10 St. James'**

Poor Thomas gets a bum rap in the gospels. For all time he is known as doubting. Yet, I wonder what's wrong with that label. I don't know about you, but I have doubts all the time about all kinds of things? I find that there are aspects of faith in which I am skeptical from time to time. What I propose is that belief and skepticism are not at odds with one another. Rather, they are complementary. A true believer is one who must question, have doubts, remains skeptical about what one hears. The skeptic asks the deeper questions.

When I was a chaplain to a multi-religious community I found my favorite group of residents was the Unitarian Universalists. They were not afraid to ask the deep questions. It was quite literally expected. If you were a good UU you would ask questions. Actually if you didn't ask the deeper questions about things the UUs were skeptical about you. As one who values the questions more than the answers I felt at home with this group of residents.

It is only natural that Thomas and others would have doubted the story of the resurrection of Jesus. This small band of brothers and sisters that followed Jesus had just undergone a traumatic shock to their community.

As one of my scripture professors, Angela Bauer wrote, "What strikes me first is that the followers of Jesus right after Easter are foremost afraid; afraid that they'll be next, afraid of going outside, afraid of being

able to survive in the everyday." She continues, "The traumatic experiences of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion have left his followers paralyzed by fear. They lock themselves in, and are literally afraid to be "out." They are terrified to proclaim to the world who they are. In this environment of fear, Jesus loving and patiently reveals himself to his followers a second time. During this second time, the risen Jesus engages Thomas who has had to give up "faith" to learn to see with his own eyes. Note that Jesus does not shun, condemn, blame or shame him for his doubt. Rather, Jesus understands his doubt and skepticism. Jesus meets Thomas exactly where he was and accepted him just as he was.

The good news of Easter is that Jesus is always coming to us, returning for us. This he will do again and again. This is not only a promise for the next life, but also a reality of our present life. Jesus comes repeatedly to give us peace and the Holy Spirit, so that, as the psalmist says in Psalm 150, let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Jesus comes to us just as we are not blaming or shaming but loving us as we are.

I want us to do an exercise this morning that might make you feel a little uncomfortable. I want all of you to get comfortable in your seat. Put your feet on the floor and your hands resting comfortably in your laps. Now close your eyes.

Imagine you are on a beautiful beach...your favorite one wherever that might be.

You see someone walking down the beach at a distance toward you. As the person gets closer you realize that it is Jesus walking toward you. As he gets closer you get a look at his face and it is a look that communicates to you that he wants to thank you.

The look he gives you as he draws near tells you that he is pleased with you and wants to thank you for all the good things you have done for him in this world. He is not judging you, blaming you; he isn't seeing your faults. All he sees is the beauty of his creation and he gently says thank you with his eyes.

Now I want you to take a minute or so to answer this question.

What is it that Jesus is thanking you for doing for him? What is it that you have done that makes him so grateful that you are here?

This my friends is what I believed Thomas experienced when Jesus appeared in that upper room. In his encounter with Jesus he experienced full acceptance for who he was doubts and all. Jesus knew the journey before Thomas and came to reveal himself and by doing so, mitigated against the fear, the doubt, and the uncertainty of Thomas' life and replaced it with love and total acceptance.

During this Easter season I hope you can experience moments of deep acceptance of yourself for the loved person you are. May you see Jesus smiling eyes look toward you in gratitude for all you do to make him more alive in this world. Amen.