

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 12, 2015  
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson

Our gospel reading for today is often termed the "Doubting Thomas" story, and for many, Thomas is the most real disciple, wanting to "see for himself", to have some empirical data that indeed this resurrection had happened. Thomas' story can be for us an affirmation that doubt is a part of our faith journey and that Jesus will meet us in our place of doubt, without reproach, and draw us into the mystery and glory of Jesus' resurrection.

So if we understand that doubt is a part of our faith journey, and not a derailment of our path, but actually an integral part of our faith formation, then let's talk about what does pull us off track from deepening our faith and how Jesus address that also in our story today.

At the end of our story, Jesus breaths the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, causing them to become apostles, those who are commissioned to bring the good news of Christ to the world. Many will say that when the disciples received the breath of the Holy Spirit, the church began. But of course, Jesus doesn't add a caveat to the reception of the Holy Spirit with specific directions about what the church is to look like, or what type of music is to be played in worship, or how to organize a capital campaign, Jesus' message about building a Christ-centered community instead is very simple. The basis for the formation of the church is to forgive sins. That's the simple directive Jesus gave us. Yet any of us who have struggled with forgiveness know this directive may be simple, but it is not easy.

So let's pull the concept of sin apart a bit. Most people will define sin not as a specific act, but rather a way of being. Sin can be that which we do or that which we are which keeps God from the world and us from one another. I remember when I was an adult in confirmation class in the Episcopal church, and we went over the confession of sin, and I remember asking, but what if I can't think of anything particularly sinful that I had done that week, not to say that I was perfect or without sin that week, but sometimes I struggled with knowing what to offer up in that pregnant and often uncomfortable pause, after the deacon says, let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor. The priest's answer was that I don't have to strain my brain to think of a laundry list of offenses for that particular week, but I can rather take the broader stance of where have I pushed God out of my life that week and/or where have I ruptured my relationships with others.

If we see sin as a way of being which doesn't allow ourselves to be fully embraced by the love of God, or sin as a barrier that has become entrenched in the way we think or regularly make decisions, that doesn't allow ourselves to be fully embraced by the love of each other, I have a feeling if we go deeply into our hearts, we will find fear at the basis of all of these ruptures.

Fear that if I apologize, my apology won't be accepted.  
Fear that if I let God into my life I will no longer be in control.  
Fear that if I speak the truth in love, I will be chastised and ostracized from people I love.  
Fear that if I love too deeply, I will be hurt.  
Fear that if I expose my real self to another, or to God, I'll be rejected.  
Fear that if I stop grieving, I will forget my love, and my heart will always be empty.

Fear can drive us to take our wounds or our vulnerability and hold onto them, encapsulate them in our souls, and allow them to become our identity. When we allow the wounds inside us to become us, and be that part which we offer to the world, we have created distance between us and God and between us and each other. This is what Jesus is asking us to let go of today.

Jesus says, if you forgive the sins of others, they will be forgiven. If you retain the sins, they are retained. Forgive your own sins, forgive the sins of others. This is what the church is built upon: the directive to heal our separation from God and each other through forgiveness.

We commonly understand that Jesus took away the sins of the world through his death on the cross, and many may look at this as some magical fix that Jesus' death somehow crosses out our sins 2000 years later, the times we lie, we cheat, we steal, etc. are erased and we feel like we're "off the hook" for what we have done wrongly.

However the resurrection message is so much broader and stronger than that. For through Jesus' death and resurrection, in the love he so willingly offered to the world, Jesus replaced the fundamental separation between God and the world with communion, holy communion, communion with the holy. It wasn't some magical fix offered for us, but rather it is an invitation to enter into communion with God and one another, in a brand new way.

And so, to come into the communion Jesus offers us, we need to show our wounds (our hurts, others' betrayal of us, our moments of spiritual exhaustion, the abuse endured from someone we thought loved us, the sharp words of an acquaintance), and show them to each other and to Christ, as Jesus showed his wounds of betrayal, confusion, abuse, and exhaustion, to his disciples. For it was through the wounds of Jesus that Thomas saw and believed in the divine love offered to him. Likewise, it is through our wounds, when we offer them to Christ, that divine love flows, drawing us into communion with God and one another. Jesus says to Thomas, and to us, reach out and live forever. Come into a unity with God and with each other, which is eternal. Experience God's peace.

For any of you who have read Henri Nouwen's book, *The Wounded Healer*, you understand exactly what this is about. God has the power to take our wounds, heal

them, and use them to bring good into the world. Marci Taylor, who was one of our Lenten series speakers, was a perfect example of this experience. God healed her heart from the death of her young son, and set her off into the world, bringing opportunities for healing from grief into our community through the Drew Michael Taylor Foundation of Hope. She opened her wounds to Christ. Christ healed them. And through that experience is bringing others into communion with the peace of God.

When Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." Thomas was affirming that he knew the risen Christ at such a depth now that life is changed. The "knowing of the risen Christ" happened in the disciples when they saw the open wounds and saw that life flowed through them. This will happen to us when we open our wounds and allow life to flow through them; we will then know the risen Christ in and through our healing.

If instead we chose to succumb to fear, we may find that our wounds and vulnerability become encapsulated, and that we embody the hurt, and become the hurt, and offer this hurt to others. We need to be intentional about pushing away fear so we don't hold onto our wounds and permit them to rupture relationships and thus create our sinfulness.

Examples:

I remember once overhearing someone say proudly, "We'll I'll never forgive her". I was shocked that someone would chose to hold onto a grudge or a hurt and would be happy and self-righteous about it. There was the initial pain, then fear must have surrounded it, perhaps fear of what the person said about them was true, and she would need to reorder her own reality, and then the relationship was broken. A separation occurred because the underlying pain was not offered to Christ and then healed.

When I meet with the women at The Roxbury Treatment Center as a WIN volunteer, I witness the same cycle happen with so many of the women there. There was abuse, of one kind or of many kinds, fear surrounded it, and then the women encapsulated the pain, embodied the abuse, and have become abusers. Some of proud of that fact and have taken that on as their identity. Others I can tell, yearn to know to be something different, to heal their deep pain, so they don't have to be a victim and abuser all their lives.

It seems we can experience pain and woundedness and either offer it to Christ to be healed, or we can experience pain woundedness, and allow it manifest in separation from others and from God, in sinfulness.

So isn't it interesting that this text follows the glory of Easter Sunday. It seems like such a downer, such a depressing topic to talk about when the lilies are still fragrant

in the church, the paschal candle is still lit, and the memory of singing, Christ our Lord is risen today, and the release of finally being able to say, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia is still in our hearts -- and we're going to have a baptism today at the 10 a.m. service. Shouldn't we, couldn't we, just stay in the glory place a little while longer?

I think this text follows Easter Sunday to remind us that the invitation to communion is always there. Jesus' resurrection did fundamentally change the world; it did repair the relationship between humankind and God in a profound way; and there is a peace that we are offered through our unity with the risen Christ, which is to be celebrated.

This peace which is unlike the peace the world offers: a peace that sustains, a peace that will not be taken away; a peace that is present to us in chaos, a peace which can untroubled our hearts.

However, our text tells us that this is daily and hard work. We may find ourselves often drenched in fear as we awake in the middle of the night; there will be times when we succumb to anxiety and worry about what will happen to us in a particular situation; there will be times when we will protect our hearts from loving too much, or forgiving too often, or feeling another's pain.

Yet the call is for us in those moments is to push away our fear, present our wounds for healing to Christ, and then to offer the divine love which pours out of our healing into the world. For divine love, which is stronger than any form of death, cannot be possessed. There's a plaque at Holy Cross Monastery, which sums up their Benedictine rule: Love must act, as light must shine and fire must burn.

Love, unity, reconciliation, communion must act, and we are the ones to do it.

Our goal is to inspire others, support each other in our journeys of faith, and live into the goodness God so freely offers us, so that the glory of last Sunday, of our Easter celebration will be in our hearts and in our world.

Our story today begins by recounting that the events began on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week – symbolizing a brand new creation. Let us celebrate and experience Jesus' resurrection this day and all days as a community oriented toward the communion Jesus' resurrection offers to us, through the healing of our wounds.