

Date: April 28th, 2019 Easter Season  
Text: John 20:19-31  
Title: Thank God for Thomas!  
Rev. Sharon Smith

- Jesus leaves the disciples in order that they may learn to trust God for themselves and mature into full human beings who will bring love and peace to those around them.
- Jesus calls the disciples to be in it together in community - practicing the grace of forgiveness.
- And so it is with us - faith married to doubt worked out in community.

Probably one of the most anxiety provoking moments of my life was getting my drivers licence. I have done this test 3 times. Anyone want to go for a drive with me?

No. I have only failed once - the first two tests were taken in South Africa. The third time was to get my BC drivers licence.

But I will never forget the words of an instructor after I had finally got my drivers licence in South Africa. Congratulations, now go and learn how to drive!

There is something about leaving the teacher, leaving the secure environment of education. Passing the test, leaving the school is actually only the doorway to learning. The beginning.

For learning happens, not when there is another more knowledgeable with us, but mostly when we are on our own, separated out, navigating the paths, needing to make our own decisions, wrestling with our questions, our doubts. And finding our way.

Today we are considering the life of Thomas who, in the midst of his grief over losing a close companion and teacher Jesus, is trying to find his way forward. And while grief is painful, grief also brings with it a tremendous clarity and honesty about life.

And today we are also baptizing Arthur John Stewart. Welcoming this child into a way of life. A way that values faith, God, AND values questions, and authentic seeking in community.

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Lets first turn to the story of Thomas.

How nice it must have been for these disciples to have had Jesus' presence.  
We read in today's gospel that they were hiding because of fear.  
And then Jesus stands among them and they experience peace.  
And then he assures them and they even rejoice.  
From fear to peace to rejoicing.  
That's quite a trip!

And then we have Thomas. Who in this account is brave.  
How much easier is it to go along with everyone else. To inhabit group mentality or over-identification.

Instead Thomas expresses what he is truly thinking. He courageously and vulnerably names exactly where he is in his belief and unbelief about Jesus.  
And this separates him out from the group of disciples. Not a comfortable position, I'm sure. Thomas lingers in his most truest conviction. And waits.

It's interesting to me, how John includes Thomas in his narrative.

I wonder if Thomas' words mirrored some of the others disciples' deeper concerns - even though they had seen the risen Christ.

For it is in community, places of deep honesty, where we grow spiritually. For all around us are people struggling with what we perhaps cannot yet name.

Thomas Keating writes: That on the spiritual journey there is usually someone in our family, business, or community whom we cannot endure, someone who has a genius for bringing out the worst in us. No matter what we do, we cannot seem to improve the relationship. God uses them to reflect my problem back to me. And he says, the person who gives us the most trouble may be our greatest gift from God. (Invitation to Love, p 20).

No wonder we have come to shame this disciple with the label "Doubting Thomas"  
His response touches something deep in each one of us, that perhaps we are not ready to face.

And in this way Thomas becomes a gift to us.

He expresses our uncertainty. He opens a doorway for us into what Richard Rohr calls the second half of life.

Rohr writes: "I worry about 'true believers' who cannot carry any doubt of anxiety at all, as Thomas and Mother Theresa learned to do... To hold the full mystery of life is always to endure its other half, which is the equal mystery of death and doubt. To know anything fully is always to hold that part of it which is still mysterious and unknowable" (Falling Upward, p.111-2)

Thomas questioning is motivated by a desire, a longing to touch God.

Friends, spiritual growth requires of us both a time of learning and a time of questioning those learnings. Construction and deconstruction.

This is why training children in a faith tradition is so so important. It gives each human being a container for early spiritual development. So that adult faith, the faith that questions, holds uncertainty can fully mature out of a secure foundation.

The spiritual journey can be seen in parallel to the physical and emotional maturation of a child.

For there is a time to protect, to teach absolutes, to guard against the impact of strong influences. And then when the time is right, children need to be exposed.

Parents need to trust their child to reason for themselves, to try something on their own for the first time, it is part of maturation. Steps toward growth.

Building faith requires the double function of learning and doubt that lead us to trust.

Yet Jesus invitation to us to trust, one day at a time. To trust. No matter how many conflicting thoughts, emotions and experiences we carry inside. We say hello to them all. And know that they are all welcome here.

I thank God for Thomas.

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Maria, Nick and Arthur, today together we bear witness to God's love for us, before we get to do anything.

Arthur has begun his journey. And with each new day, with each new phase of his development. There will be both times for teaching and times for holding space for his questions.

And parallel to this, there will be times that you both will need sources of wisdom and a place for your own questions.

Sitting with you are Greg and Carla, chosen by you as godparents or sponsors, to be there for Arthur as he finds his way in life. And as close family for you both as you find your way.

We need community. And that is what we are here for at St Catherine's. Friendships forged in the messiness of life. The times when we shake our heads and cannot trust God. And for the times when fear is settled by the peace of Christ in our midst.

Baptism is our beginning. It is our welcoming in.

Let us as we welcome Arthur - ask ourselves these questions afresh:

- Are we doing our best to create a space for children to learn this faith?
- Are we available to be mentors and guides to those younger than us, going through the milestones that we have faced in our lives?
- Are we open to hear the questions of the next generation?

This is the beauty of intergenerational community. Though we will rub each other up the wrong way and say the wrong things at the wrong time. We need each other.

It is no wonder that Jesus leaves the disciples with words about forgiveness. The power of forgiveness. For when we do not open ourselves up to the possibility of forgiveness, the hurt, shame and pain lingers as if it were never dealt with.

And community is our greatest treasure.

For in the absence of the human Jesus, that leaves us with many questions.

We become the body of the Risen Christ together and for each other.  
Broken - yet present and tangible. Christ with skin on. Touchable.

I thank God for Thomas.

And I thank God for each one of you on this journey of faith.

Amen.