

April 11, 2021 The Second Sunday in the Season of Easter

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

John 20:19-31

"Show Me You Know Me"

Douglas T. King

There are a number of stories and legends behind Missouri's sobriquet "Show-Me" state. The official manual of the state of Missouri presents the following:

The most widely known legend attributes the phrase to Missouri's U.S. Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver, who served in the United States House of Representatives from 1897 to 1903. While a member of the U.S. House Committee on Naval Affairs, Vandiver attended an 1899 naval banquet in Philadelphia. In a speech there, he declared, 'I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me.' Regardless of whether Vandiver coined the phrase, it is certain that his speech helped to popularize the saying."

(sos.mo.gov/archives/history/slogan)

I am thinking that perhaps the disciple Thomas should be the patron saint of Missouri.

Welcome to the second Sunday in the season of Easter. I have to say it does not have quite the pop and pomp and circumstance of last week. In my home the last of the colored eggs have been transformed into egg salad and consumed. And it is a little difficult to keep the euphoria of Easter Sunday going.

Besides, for most of us, resurrection or not, our lives did not change too much on the Monday following Easter Sunday. God may have achieved the ultimate victory over death, but our daily human limitations do not seem to have been swept away with the miraculous tide. The bumps and bruises of being in this world have continued. It is quite easy to lose sight of the resurrection when your back goes out; your kids are cranky; your boss is less than impressed with your work; and death is still a reality on the news and in our lives.

We could use a little daily proof that Jesus has indeed won victory over death. I feel that Thomas has gotten a rather poor rap in the colloquialism of the church, being saddled with the moniker, doubting Thomas. Thomas' questions regarding the resurrection of Jesus are a bit more complex and perhaps more important, if that is possible, than of those solely in regards to the existence of the risen Christ.

What strikes me most about Thomas' demand for proof of the risen Christ is that he does not ask merely to see his risen Lord standing before him in some shimmering form of divinity proving both his victory over death and his identity as the Son of God. Thomas asks to see the wounds, "to see the marks of the nails in his hands," to literally put his hands in the wounds of Christ.

Some have argued that Thomas made this demand because he wanted to ensure he was not dealing with an imposter, others have argued that he was demonstrating the unbelievability of any claim that Jesus could be alive in

any fashion. Now, I am sure both of those may be true, resurrection is not easy for any of us to believe, but I also think Thomas wanted to touch the wounds of Jesus to ensure that they had not been lost in the resurrection.

He is less concerned with the halo around Jesus' head than about the scars on his body. Thomas wants to know that Jesus has not left behind all remnants of his humanity. He realizes that this resurrected God could not be their teacher and leader and friend if he was transformed completely beyond all that made him human. Thomas wants to know that Jesus remembers what pain is, that suffering has not become a distant academic concept, but still a part of who Jesus is that will not be washed away and forgotten in the waters of the divine.

When Thomas sees the wounds, he knows. He knows that not only has Jesus conquered death, but he has carried humanity with him into the victory. When Thomas sees the wounds he knows that not only is this indeed the man that lived the pain of crucifixion but that this God understands the pain of each one of us. When Thomas sees the wounds he knows that the resurrected Jesus has crossed a boundary carrying pain and suffering with him and has thus created a space beyond pain and suffering for all of humanity.

Jesus resurrection makes real the words of the theologian John Carmody, "Pain is crucifying but penultimate."

Thomas may have demanded proof before he would believe that Jesus had arisen, but he is the first to recognize the implications of what it all means. When the other disciples see the risen Jesus, they are speechless, but

when Thomas sees the wounded Christ he cries out, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas recognizes Jesus' divinity by seeing his wounds rather than any symbol of holiness. It is by recognizing the depth of the suffering Jesus was willing to carry that we can truly recognize God in our midst.

Now that the bright colors of Easter morn have been muted to a degree, we need to hear this. We, the ones who are bumped and bruised by what life brings us, need to recognize that our God too carries the scars that come with living and loving in this world. This is a message we can carry beyond our festival worship moments; a message we can carry when hurtful things happen and we wonder if anyone cares or can even understand the hurting we feel. We have a savior who has borne his own set of wounds.

This faith of ours calls us to believe that the way in which our all-powerful God chose to defeat the powers of sin and death was by becoming a single, vulnerable, mortal human. Existence and broken-ness appear to walk hand in hand no matter who you are.

In a sermon about the death of his son, the preacher William Sloane Coffin quotes from the end of Hemingway's Farewell to Arms, "The world breaks everyone, then some become strong at the broken places." I do not claim to answer the myriad of why's that surround this, but I do know that recognizing God in the midst of our brokenness helps us to find the courage to grow stronger.

Our God knows who we are and what hurts us in a deeper way than we can imagine. Does it stop the hurting? No.

What it does is promise us that God knows the territory of our pain and our weakness. Experiencing immense physical pain? Our God has been there. Feeling lonely and misunderstood? Our God has been there. Feeling exhausted and beyond your means? Our God has been there. Feeling a low dull ache of disappointment in the world? Our God has been there.

This is what made the entire resurrection real for Thomas. Jesus chose to join us in our existence and our pain, and what is more he did not leave the real memory of that suffering behind upon his resurrection. Not only has our destiny and our relationship to God been forever changed by the resurrection, God has been forever changed. God no longer merely sympathizes with our pain, now through Jesus and his wounds God can climb inside our pain in a way never known before.

This may not be the kind of news that creates choruses of alleluias. But this is the kind of news we can carry in our hearts for the difficult days of the death of loved ones; the isolating moments of illness; the scary moments before surgery.

So let's throw a little credit Thomas' way. He may have needed to see the risen Jesus before him to believe the resurrection but he knew exactly what to look for when he had the chance.

Thanks be to God. Amen.