

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2017  
Year A - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm: Hymn to the Risen Christ

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Matthew 28:1-10

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

You may think the choice of the Gospel passage a little strange this morning. Why does the lectionary choose to give us a story in which the primary theme is doubt? Should we not still be reveling in the glory and the majesty of Christ's resurrection - perhaps re-living the beautiful story of Mary Magdalene in the early morning light in the garden, or focusing instead on the miracle of Christ's appearance to the disciples on the beach. Why do we need to be reminded of doubt - and of Christ's wounds which seem to have Thomas transfixed?

The Christian faith teaches that there is only one path to resurrected life and it passes necessarily through the cross. There is no other way. And just in case we didn't get it last week, the first Sunday after Easter gives us the resurrection gospel of Thomas the Doubter... so that we may be in no doubt.

A common feature of the resurrection appearances is that Jesus is not immediately recognisable. He must reveal his true identity to the witnesses. With Mary Magdalene in the garden, he speaks her name. On the road to Emmaus he is known in the breaking of bread. And in today's gospel, when he appears to the assembled community of disciples for the first time, his first action is to show them his hands and his side (20) - he is known to them by the wounds of crucifixion. Not by a shimmering aura around his head, not by gleaming white robes bespeaking some

ethereal transformation... but by the scars of his bitter agony and death. They know it is Jesus... because he still carries his wounds.

Thomas, who is absent at the first appearance, has lived throughout history with the negative reputation of being a 'doubter'... but not so. His caution is absolutely correct. "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and put... my hand in his side, I will not believe." (25) He will not be satisfied by any vision of resurrection, unless he can be sure that this is the same Jesus of Nazareth, crucified under Pontius Pilate, who stands before him. He will follow no other. And far from denigrating Thomas, the tradition recorded this story because he is absolutely right - a non-crucified, un-wounded Christ is an illusion... a false messiah... a dangerous lie!

Remember that it is Thomas who asks Jesus at the Last Supper, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (14.5) Thomas is the voice of ordinary people like us... in our confusion... crying out, 'Jesus, I want to follow you, I want the resurrection life you offer... but I don't know what to do. I don't know the way.' In today's gospel Thomas receives his answer. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not be faithless, but believing." (20.27)

And today we receive our answer. If we desire the resurrected life of Christ, there is only one path to walk. Throughout his ministry, Jesus used one consistent metaphor of transformation - that is, we journey to new life through the wounding of surrender, self-forgetfulness and death. There is only one way to resurrection, and it passes through the cross and tomb.

This is not easy to understand and accept. We'd all prefer it not to be this way. We'd actually prefer a different story from the one we've got. Of course we'd prefer the triumph without the defeat; the gain without the pain; the life without

the death; the resurrection without the crucifixion. We'd all prefer a glossy and 'unruffled' Christ.

But, as Richard Rohr so powerfully puts it: "The significance of Christ's wounded body is his deliberate and conscious holding of the pain of the world and his refusing to send it elsewhere. Jesus' wounds were not necessary to convince God that we were loveable; his wounds are to convince us of the path and the price of transformation."

Which is why our tradition asks us to pay careful attention throughout the whole week prior to Easter and why we call it holy... so we remember the journey, not just the wonderful outcome. It's why we kneel before the cross and touch its rough timber... so we remember the journey... even when there's a big part of us that would rather not.

There are some who wish to make belief in the resurrection a test of orthodoxy and acceptability... meaning, can a person assent to a particular understanding of what happened post-crucifixion in a narrowly proscribed propositional form. Personally I'm quite willing to ascribe to the orthodox definition of a bodily resurrection. But I doubt if that's the issue.

Rather, the big question is, whether we believe that this Easter event defines our reality... whether we choose to accept this path walked by Jesus before us... whether we let this Easter story of death and resurrection determine the way we live. Or put simply and bluntly... will we walk this path?

No, intellectual assent to the Resurrection is not the central issue. Rather... will we allow the Easter story to define the way we live? Will we do the necessary dying in order that we might live?

The weeks of Easter spread before us. Let us celebrate the feast with wonder! Our main focus in this season is to explore the future... that is, what it means to live the resurrected life. But before we set out, let's remember how we got here...

In the first week after Easter the tradition gives us Thomas and the wounded Christ... so that we know the path we have walked. And to remind us that we can only 'go forward' if we accept that the cross and tomb, are an essential part of our present and future reality.

The Risen Christ steps from the tomb carrying nothing but his wounds. His new life - the new life he calls us into - is not a denial of all that's been before. All experience is gathered up in the healing, transforming action of God... and so in the midst of his shining light, we still see the scars of his journey. Thomas is right - we need to see them... touch them... so that we can understand the reality of our own path.

I'll finish with the words of Richard Rohr...

"Jesus' wounds were not necessary to convince God that we were loveable; his wounds are to convince us of the path and the price of transformation."

In the name of God. Amen