

Sunday, April 11, 2021 – Easter 2 - Doubting Thomas, St James

‘Doubting Thomas’...we know about him, don’t we? We know this resurrection story. He is used by us in conversation. We might say ‘He is a doubting Thomas.’ Or call ourselves Doubting Thomases, often in a mildly disparaging way. Poor old Thomas...even though after his doubt he declares Jesus to be his Lord and his God, we remember him for his doubting.

The famous preacher Barbara Brown Taylor writes that before preaching a sermon on this passage, she asked some people who know the Thomas story what they think about him. They all said the same thing: they know they’re supposed to disapprove of him but they don’t. They like his honesty. They know where he’s coming from. They’re actually grateful for him, because he’s their proof that even people who were right there had trouble believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. Maybe many of us here are sympathetic to Thomas.

Thomas was allowed to doubt! That’s how he made it into the Gospel. And that is good news for us! He was not ‘swept under the carpet’. I want to point out here in his favour that all the other disciples believed because they had seen our Lord! But Thomas had not been there. He had not seen the extraordinary appearance of the risen Jesus among them. Thomas had the courage to say he could not believe it. Would you or could you have believed it? Would you or could you have had the courage to speak your doubt?

What to notice is that when Jesus reappears a week later in exactly the same way, (possibly specifically for Thomas?) Jesus knows exactly what Thomas needs. Jesus offers it to him. Here – put your finger in the mark of the nails and your hand in my side. Jesus does not banish Thomas, nor have the other disciples. Thomas is still part of the small group of the faithful. His doubt is incorporated, and accommodated and as a result...Thomas has the opportunity to encounter our Lord and he believes...intensely and entirely!

I mentioned earlier the Episcopal priest and writer Barbara Brown Taylor, once named as one of Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People. (look her up if you’re interested). She says in her book on darkness: “If you are in the dark, it does not mean that you have failed and that you have taken some terrible misstep.” She goes on, “For many years, I thought my questions and my doubt and my sense of God’s absence were all signs of my lack of faith, but now I know this is the way the life of the spirit goes.”

It’s okay to wonder and to have questions. Indeed, let’s commend them – even bless the questions! Because questions and wonder and doubt and even skepticism are signs of interest and curiosity and engagement and these, quite often, are the soil in which vibrant faith is born.

Another point. It is specifically Jesus’ wounds that Thomas wishes to see. Why? Does he need to ensure that Jesus’ wounds have not been erased? If the wounds

remain as part of the risen body, does that mean Jesus' suffering is a significant part of him, a part that has transcended everything. Are his wounds our Lord's emblem of compassion and solidarity with our suffering and brokenness? He will never forget what it is to suffer. Yes...perhaps that was what it meant to dear Thomas, causing him to exclaim 'My Lord and my God!

You all have an index card tucked into your bulletin. I invite you to write on it one question you have about the faith. Then place the question on the offering plate as you leave. If you prefer to think about it, you could write out your question at home and bring it in next week. Your question might be something you've wondered about for years. It could be something in one of the biblical readings you heard today. Maybe it will be rather trivial (why did God create mosquitoes !). Maybe it will be something big – why is my loved one in such constant pain. No matter what the question, you are invited to write it down.

Then we can wrestle with it...so that in the end...we can believe. Amen.