

Reflection: Doubting Thomas

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

We all have stories to share. Today we hear from Thomas. Thomas gets the bad rap for his doubting. For Thomas, the knowledge that he had missed the return of Jesus had to be shocking. We cannot argue his response or fault him for his reaction. He told the disciples exactly what any of us would have said in Thomas's situation. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." It is important to remember that Thomas like the other ten disciples had known Jesus as a close, personal friend over the past three years of his ministry and life. Jesus had been someone the disciples had been in relationship with. Meals, arguments, prayers, worship, miracles, lessons, all of these activities were a part of the relationship that each disciple had with Jesus.

Thomas was no different. The only difference was that the rest of the disciples had seen Jesus in the flesh. They had seen the scars on his hands where the nails had pierced the flesh, and the opening in his side where the spear of the Roman centurion had plunged. They had heard Jesus speak to them and had felt his breath as Jesus breathed on them bestowing the Holy Spirit. Thomas had experienced nothing. There was no proof of the marks, he had not seen them with his own eyes. There was no proof of the words of Jesus, he had not heard the words with his own ears. There was no proof of the breath of Jesus bestowing the Holy Spirit, Thomas had not felt the breath of Jesus on his own skin. Remember the words of Thomas, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe!" This is the story we hear shared today. Yet it is not just the story of Thomas—it is the story of each of us in one fashion or another. It is a story we need to hear again and again—to be told again and again—a story we need to tell ourselves over and over—so that we don't tire of hearing of the joys and challenges of being in relationship with God.

The good news for us is that God continues to want to tell the story again and again. And that's a good thing. We need to be reminded of the story. We need to be reminded of who we are as the chosen people of God. The Gospel of John states very clearly in Chapter 15, verse 16 who chose us to be the people of God. "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..." In God's choosing of us to be the chosen people, we have found a God who loves us and who wants to be on a first name basis with us. Do you see the importance of God telling Moses, not once--but twice, the name God identified with--I am the Lord.

Madeleine L'Engle, in her book, *Walking on Water*, tells us that our names are a part of our wholeness. She goes on to talk about the importance of our names. She says, "It used to be a moment of great importance when someone said, 'Oh, don't call me Mrs. so-and-so. Call me Anne--or Katherine. Alex or John. My name is a gift which I offer to you. I remember times when I have been given a name--and to be given a name is an act of intimacy as powerful as any act of love.'" God was participating in an act of intimacy with the people. God no longer was content to be separate from the people, receiving sacrifices and acting when necessary, God wanted to be in relationship with the people. We need to ask ourselves what it means to be the chosen people of God. What it means to be named by God as God's chosen people and to receive God's name.

This Sunday marks the anniversary of the day my son and my niece were baptized – some fourteen years ago. It was a day full of joy – both sets of grandparents traveled to be with us in worship. Aunts and uncles and friends gathered from near and far to join us for a weekend of food and family stories – laughter and tears- and then on Sunday – we came together for worship to ask God to name and claim my Son Andrew and my niece Anika as children of God – beloved and born by water and spirit into the Kingdom of God. It was a very good day. And every year, as best as we can, we mark the days of our baptisms in our family to remind each of us that God's love washed over us in the waters of baptism and we will forever be known as children of God. It is our identity. It is who we are.

We must ask ourselves what our responsibility is, now that we have been named, chosen, and blessed as the people of God. God's chosen people. As God's chosen people we have an identity. In our naming and sharing in story we build a communal identity; grounded in our faith in God and the promises of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is this communal identity that breathes life into us as the people of God, the Body of Christ. This is who we are.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together*, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this." This is who we are or at the least who we want to be. Our identity comes from Jesus Christ. We have been named as the people of God. God called us to be the chosen people and invited us to be in relationship with each other as well as with God through Jesus Christ. It is God's choosing to be in relationship with us that reminds us that we are not alone in this struggle to live out who we are. Even in the midst of safer-at-home orders and physical distancing – we are still named as the people of God – we are still chosen – we are still invited to be in relationship with our God and with each other.

I wonder if this is the time to revisit your soul. If you have found yourself disconnected from your spiritual life, might this be an opportunity to befriend your soul once again. I know, I know – "Great, PC, one more thing I need to add to my list." Not at all my friends. In the midst of homeschooling, mask-making, working from home, praying for sanity, quarantining, physical distancing, and checking in on others, I have no desire to add more to your list. But I wonder if in these new days of Easter, you might find your Bible or open a Bible app on your smartphone and choose a psalm a day to read – hearing God's own voice echoing in your heart. Psalm 23 is always a good place to start – The Lord in my Shepherd. Psalm 121 – I lift my eyes to the hills. Psalm 42 – As the deer longs for water, so longs my soul for you, O God. Psalm 95 – Come let us sing to the lord, let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Psalm 139 – Lord, you have searched me and known me. In these days of feeling alone, God's reminder to me is that I am known by God.

We are a community founded on the richness of our faith and our love for each other and for God even if our actions do not always reflect that faith and love. We are a community that has weathered more than a few storms in our life. It is God's promise to be with us that allows us to persevere in the face of the trials and struggles that have concerned this community in its history. God has called us to be a chosen people. God has named us. Our story has a title and a history rich in service and belief as well as struggle and hardship. Christ came to this world, not to be served, but to serve. We need to follow his example and begin to see each other as the ones we need to serve. It is our responsibility to tell the story of Jesus Christ. In our actions, in our words, in our very lives. We are called by God to lead by example. We are called to love and to serve each other as we are loved and served by God. God has given us the name by which we are to know God, and his name is Jesus. It is with that name on our lips; that name written on our hearts; that we continue the journey of discovering who we are as the people of God and what that means for our lives.

So today, I am grateful for Thomas. He is my hero in the days that are long and the weeks that go by too slow. Thomas is the one that reminds me that in my doubts, I find myself diving deeper into God's promises for each of us, to be with us even to the end of the age. Thanks be to God! Amen.