

Easter 2C, 2010

Text: John 20:19-31

Title: Talking about Thomas

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Today we are tempted to talk about Thomas. If we talk about Thomas we have two options: Either we can look down our noses at Thomas and all those other “scientific” minded folk out there who demand proof before they will believe, or we can sympathize with Thomas and admit to all those times when we, too, have doubted Jesus. But neither of these options really get at what today’s text is all about.

It’s natural to want to talk about Thomas today. You see, Thomas likes to talk about Thomas. When the other disciples tell them that they have seen the Lord, Thomas responds, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and I place my finger into the mark of the nails, and I place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” I, I, my, I, my, I. Thomas likes to talk about Himself.

Talking about yourself is the opposite of faith. Thinking and talking about yourself is the definition of sin. Sin is focusing on yourself- thinking and talking and acting in your own interest, putting yourself in the center of the universe.

Think of Adam and Eve- they acted in their own interest, rather than trusting in God. Think about the people of Israel in the wilderness- they whined and complained; they only thought about themselves. Think about King David- when He saw Bathsheba he could only think about Himself.

All sin has that root selfishness and self-regard at its root.

Our temptation is always to think about ourselves and talk about ourselves. We are constantly tempted to make everything about us.

Consider our church. We’re always tempted to think about ourselves and talk only about ourselves- our members, our finances, our programs, our services, our pastor, us, us, us. We can easily make church all about us.

When we talk to other folks, and we only talk about ourselves, then our focus is off. Instead of talking all about ourselves, and what a nice, friendly congregation we are, we should talk about Jesus and what He has done.

It’s much easier to talk about ourselves. But to speak faithfully is to talk about Jesus and what He’s up to.

Back to Thomas. He starts out talking about himself- what he can see and touch.

But listen to Thomas after he meets the risen Jesus. What does Thomas say? “My Lord and my God!” Now Thomas can only talk about Jesus. He gives the clearest confession of faith of anyone in the whole Gospel story. Thomas confesses that Jesus Christ is His Lord and His God, and Jesus calls that faith.

Jesus changes Thomas from talking about himself to talking about his Lord.

And Jesus does the same to us. Jesus changes us from being inwardly focused and self-centered, to confessing and worshipping Him as Lord and God.

So let’s talk about Jesus and what He’s up to in today’s gospel.

Jesus is risen from the dead. He’s endured the pain and humiliation of Good Friday. He’s been abandoned, tortured and executed. After three years of being misunderstood, falsely accused and harassed, He was finally put to death.

You’d think that Jesus would be done with this place. You’d think that He’d leave and never come back. You’d think that Jesus would go home to heaven to be with His Father and never been seen on earth again.

But for some strange reason, Jesus sticks around. Jesus does not return to His Father right away, but He comes back for His disciples. That’s how much He loves them.

Jesus comes back to forgive and restore His disciples.

When Jesus comes to be among His disciples that first Easter evening, you’d think He would chew them out. You’d think that He would be upset with them for abandoning Him and denying Him. You’d think that He would be mad at them for not remember His words. At least three times Jesus told His disciples that He would be put to death and then rise again. But they still hadn’t believed Him.

But instead of chewing out His disciples and scolding them for their lack of faith, Jesus speaks words of peace to His disciples. His words of peace restore them and forgive them. Jesus’ words leave no doubt that they are loved and forgiven for all of their doubts and failures.

And Jesus doesn’t stop with just words. His words would have been enough, but Jesus goes further. He shows them His hands and His side.

There are many reasons why Jesus could have done this. It could have been for a number of reasons.

It could be to show the disciples that it was really Jesus and not another. Jesus could be making sure that His disciples know that it’s really Him and not someone else.

It could be to show the disciples that the resurrection was real, and that Jesus was not just a spirit. Even though He can enter locked rooms, He still has a real, physical body.

But there's probably more. There are other ways that Jesus could have proved His identity to His disciples, and there are other ways He could have showed that He had a real, physical body.

Jesus showed them His hands and His side. He shows them the wounds that He bore for them. Jesus shows the disciples their salvation. These marks showed the disciples how much Jesus loved them. These were the marks of the cross, the scars of self-sacrifice. When Jesus showed the disciples His hands and His side, He showed them what kind of love that He has for them, the love that endured physical pain and death for them.

John says that the disciples were glad to see Jesus. When they heard His voice and saw His hands and side, they knew that they were loved and forgiven and saved, and that made them glad.

Jesus is not done with the disciples, and so He sends them out with the Holy Spirit to forgive sins.

And so the disciples go out. And the first person the disciples go out and find is Thomas. He's their friend, not some stranger, not a random person on the street, but someone that they already know. They give Thomas the same message that Mary Magdalene had spoken earlier, "We have seen the Lord." Simple, straightforward, to the point.

Thomas has His questions, but the disciples don't answer them. Thomas has his doubts, but the disciples don't address them. That's for Jesus to do. All the disciples do is bring Thomas to the place where Jesus will meet with them.

The next Sunday night, once again the disciples are together, and this time Thomas is there, too.

Again, Jesus comes back to be with them. Jesus comes for Thomas' sake. Jesus loves Thomas, and doesn't want Thomas to miss out.

Again, Jesus speaks words of peace, and again Jesus shows His disciples His love for them by showing His hands and His side.

Today's gospel is all about Jesus. Yes, Thomas is there too, along with the others, but they are important only as those who receive the Lord's love and forgiveness.

Jesus is at the center of the gospel lesson. Not only does He die and rise again for His disciples, He makes sure that those gifts are delivered to them through His word and through His very bodily presence with them.

Jesus not only did this those first two Sundays of Easter, He does that each and every Sunday for us as well.

Jesus comes to you each week, speaking words of peace. You have denied your Lord and let Him down. Your life is filled with fear and doubt. But Jesus still comes, speaking words of peace.

And then He gives you His body and blood, broken and shed for you. Just like when He showed His wounded body to His disciples, He gives His wounded body to you to show you His love for you. The very source of your salvation is here for you to see and touch, just like the disciples did.

And you respond by going out and finding the folks that are missing, and telling them you have seen the Lord, bringing them back here, so that no one is left out the next time Jesus comes to visit.

Your words are changed from talking only about yourself, to confessing that Jesus is your Lord and your God.

When the disciples met Jesus, they were changed. They were changed from hiding in fear and only thinking about themselves, to getting back out into the world and talking about Jesus. That's what Jesus did for the disciples, Thomas, too, and it's what He does for you.