

PK'S REFLECTIONS: 2nd Sunday of Easter

Imagine you're sitting in your home... behind locked doors... and suddenly the risen Jesus is standing in your midst. What would your reaction be? Fear? Awe? Confusion? Joy?

It's hard to really imagine, isn't it?! Most likely, your reaction would be one of mixed emotions—all of the above.

This was the experience of the disciples. They were hiding out in a locked room—consumed by grief... and fear—afraid for their lives! They had just witnessed the arrest, trial, and brutal crucifixion of their friend and Lord. Now what would *they* do? What would happen to *them*? Would *they* be next?

Suddenly, Jesus is there with them... standing in their midst. Locked doors can't keep him out! Grief and fear can't keep him out! The risen Jesus comes to them—to offer a blessing of peace ... to offer his wounded body as “evidence”... to breathe on them the gift of the Spirit—to give them life... and a purpose.

Imagine, now, that you are Thomas. You weren't with the others when Jesus appeared to them; you only hear about it secondhand. Is it really any wonder that Thomas reacts as he does?! You'd be skeptical too, wouldn't you?! Who wouldn't want “tangible evidence” in a time of crisis and fear?

Personally, I've always thought Thomas gets a bad rap. He expressed what any of us would have wanted. And yet he is forever pigeon-holed / labeled with the adjective “doubting” for saying what we would all say.

He only wanted what he missed... what the others had experienced. He wanted to see the risen Jesus for himself. He wanted to hear the same blessing of peace... to receive the same Spirit. He wanted to be—with the others—a witness to his resurrected, living, loving Lord.

Now, before I move on, I think it's important to point out that the disciples did not believe Mary Magdalene's earlier witness about the risen Lord either. Only when Jesus appears to them—in their locked room—and shows them his hands and his side... do they recognize “their Lord” and rejoice. So, in “not believing” *their* witness to the resurrection, Thomas is really responding no differently.

We say that Thomas “doubts.” I think he's honest and real. He asks for what he thinks he *needs* to believe. He asks Jesus to show up for him like he did for the rest. He asks Jesus to be present to him—really, truly, tangibly present—so he *can* believe. [He sounds a lot like the psalmist(s) of the Old Testament—asking God... expecting God to show up and respond to their needs.]

And look what happens... Jesus shows up. He meets Thomas exactly where he needs meeting—no condemnation... only invitation. He fulfills Thomas' need. He answers Thomas' honest, “doubting” “demands” with compassion and love. And in response, Thomas exclaims, “*My Lord and my God*”—the most powerful and complete confession of faith there is in John's gospel.

[It's interesting... reading this passage, it seems that once Jesus showed up and Thomas got to *experience* the presence of his risen Lord, he forgot about all of his voiced “demands” for belief.]

Dear friends, the life of faith can be wonderful and full of joy, but as we know all too well, it can also be really hard. The truth is, our faith is not always strong. We often wonder where God is.

A global pandemic strikes and our lives are turned upside down... a loved one dies / is diagnosed with stage 4 cancer... we lose our job / can't find a job... we live in fear / anxiety about an unknown future for us, our

country, our world—ALL of these things (and more) wear on us. Faith can be a strength and support during times like these... or it can be casualty of the realities around us. We *need*, like Thomas (and rest), to have our risen Lord show up—to make his presence known... to hear his words of peace... to feel his Spirit blow in and through us...

I don't think that doubt is the opposite of faith. It is an essential ingredient of faith... because faith always seeks greater understanding... faith pushes us beyond the "easy answers" the world gives ... faith demands and expects God to show up where we need God to show up—to meet us in our need!

One piece of good news that I hear in this story is this: when we are locked in rooms of grief and fear... when we are filled with questions or doubt... when we *need* solid "evidence" that God is real and present and in power—God shows up! It's okay to ask God for what we need—in fact, God expects us to!

"My Lord and my God"—may this be our confession, too!

Lord God... stay close... and let us know and feel your presence... your peace... your power. Amen.