

My Lord and My God —Rev. Denise Stone

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 5-19-19

We have been looking at the Resurrection Appearances for Jesus for the last few weeks. This week we will move beyond Easter Sunday, to a week later.

Before we get to the Sunday after Easter, we are told that Thomas is informed about the Risen Christ. Remember that Thomas had not been with the other disciples behind that locked door on Easter evening, so he did not see the risen Christ. He had already heard the testimony of the women, and now of Peter and the other disciples. But Thomas says he can only believe if he sees and touches the Jesus and the wounds from the crucifixion.

Thomas has gotten a bad rap over the centuries being labeled with the moniker of “Doubting Thomas.” I don’t know that I would have been any less “doubting” than he was. If you see him throughout John’s gospel, Thomas appears to be more of a literalist or a realist. And he didn’t see Jesus like the other disciples did. I cannot blame him for his skepticism. Let’s face it, other than Jesus, people just don’t come back from the dead.

So, that brings us to the week after Easter Sunday. The disciples, all of them, are again found behind a locked door. Notice that even though most of them saw Jesus, they appear to be afraid still.

It is as they are gathered that Jesus again appears to them. He doesn't come through the door, but is there with the disciples. He addresses Thomas and says see here are my hands and side, come and touch me.

We get the impression from John that Thomas did not actually touch Jesus, but upon seeing him, he makes the most significant statement about Jesus by anyone in the Gospel – he declares that Jesus is HIS Lord and HIS God. George R. Beasley-Murray, the writer of the Word Biblical Commentary on John relates this as “a confession issuing from the depths of Thomas’ soul: “You are my Lord and my God.”

A number of commentators I read this week pointed out that this statement by Thomas brings the Gospel of John full circle from its opening lines: John 1:1 and 2. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (NRSV). Jesus is understood by Thomas to BE God. And God

incarnate. God in the Flesh. Not just his teacher, not just his leader – but Jesus is declared both his Lord and his God. Thomas' request to see and touch the risen Jesus is a reminder for the reader or hearer that Jesus is God made man.

Often the next line of today's text is read as a rebuke of Thomas by Jesus. However, many of those same commentators pointed out that it is a better translation to understand Jesus to say, "because you have seen me you have believed." Then Jesus goes on to address not just the disciples but really those first hearers or readers of John's Gospel as well as us – blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Last week I pointed out that had the first followers of Christ not seen the risen Jesus, I would have doubted that they would have spread the news of Jesus' bodily resurrection throughout the known world. Most of the early followers were condemned to die for their beliefs. I find it hard to think that they would have gone to their graves for professing that Jesus was raised from the dead if he had not been.

Anyone after the first two generations of Christians had passed away fall into this category – blessed

are those who have not seen and yet believe. None of us have seen the physical, risen Jesus Christ. And yet, we have faith. And that is what it is – faith.

I cannot show anyone the risen Jesus Christ. I can only share my experiences of Jesus and the impact that my belief in Jesus and relationship with God have had on my life.

Given that we are the people who have not seen and yet believed, what is it that we are to learn from Thomas, the other disciples and from Jesus in this passage?

First, I would say to not beat yourselves up if and when you have doubts in your faith. As a children's minister I would often tell the kids that God can handle our questions. I have often told adults that God can handle both our questions and our anger.

Thomas had doubts. The disciples seemed to continue to have doubts by the text finding them still behind a locked door even after seeing the risen Jesus. There will be times when your faith seems shaky. There will be times when you are angry at God. That is okay. Wrestle with your doubts.

Study, pray – learn. Come talk to me or a trusted member of the congregation that you think has a strong faith. Allow Jesus to become real to you again – just as Jesus became real again for Thomas.

The second item I would suggest for you to take from this text today is to realize that you came to faith without seeing. You relied on the witness of Scripture and the witness of other believers.

Paul reminds us in Romans, chapter 10 verse 14, “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (NRSV).

WE are the **someones** that are to proclaim him. You and I. I have said it several times since coming here and I will probably continue to say it. Surveys have found that approximately 50% of the people who do not attend church regularly would attend if they were invited by a family member or a friend. You are that family member and friend. Who have you invited to church? To whom have you talked about your faith?

If you struggle with an answer to that, let me encourage you to change that this week. A simple, “hey, do you want to join me at church on Sunday” is really all it takes to begin to introduce someone to the God you love and serve.

Works Cited:

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