

EASTER 2.B

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 23, 2006

Acts 3:13-15,17-26

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31

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<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

<sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe <sup>□</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Thomas has gotten a bad reputation. He has been known throughout the years as "Doubting Thomas". (Certainly no great mark of respect.) He has been called weak and afraid. Thomas has forgiven us for slandering his reputation, I'm sure. He certainly had a great relationship with Christ. Before the story is finished this morning he has proclaimed Jesus "My Lord and my God." And Jesus has acknowledged Thomas' faith. Thomas is in a position to forgive us for calling him "Doubting Thomas". But we are not doing Thomas a disservice by calling him weak - nearly as much as we are doing ourselves a disservice.

We are hiding an important lesson for ourselves when we accuse Thomas of faithlessness. There is much happiness to be had here.

When we call Thomas "a doubter" and say he was weak...then it is pretty easy to separate ourselves from him. We may start thinking, at least a little bit, "Yes, Thomas was confused; he was anxious; he did not know Jesus was alive - but after all, he was weak. He was faithless. He wasn't like me. I don't have the kinds of problems Thomas had."

And so we make this story an interesting story...but one that doesn't have anything to do with us.

Thomas was a good man. He was matter-of-fact. He had his feet on the ground. Thomas wanted Jesus to be alive just as much as any of the disciples - but Thomas was not going to believe Jesus was alive just because he wanted to. I appreciate that, and I want to be that way myself.

Don't we all know people who manufacture their faith according to what they want to be true...instead of what they can see and feel? They say, "I want God to make me successful. I want God to heal this illness. I want God to straighten out my family or put oil

on my land", or anything else that people might pray about...and then say "expect a miracle". Those people say the mark of Christianity is believing in what you want to be true. Just because you want it.

I never heard God promise that and neither had Thomas. He wanted Jesus to be alive. But he was not going to believe Jesus was alive just because he wanted to. He had to be convinced.

Let's not make Thomas into someone who is not like us. Thomas is just like us. We hear that Jesus has defeated death, just like Thomas had heard. The problem is not that we haven't been told that God is alive and part of our lives...The problem is not in whether we are told. The problem is whether we are convinced.

Thomas must have had some bad days. Wanting to believe his master was alive, but not allowing himself to go off the deep end. He would have to know. It would not be enough to have a second hand story. Thomas had to know, personally. And, until he was shown, Thomas had to fight his anxiety alone. His confusion, his hopes against his reason...

There is a lot that God is trying to tell us in this story. Let's not miss it by thinking that Thomas is different from us.

We have bad days. Anxiety, confusion. Not because we haven't heard about God's love...because we are not convinced.

We've heard...God became one of us - it cost him his life but he defeated death. So now we live with God and God lives with us and it is a wonderful story...We've heard it, but we're not going to believe it just because we want it to be true. We are practical. It has to be real.

We are not going to accept some second hand account from other people. We have to be convinced personally.

Thomas was not a weak person. He was not a bad person. Thomas was not mean. And we are not weak. We are not bad people. We are not mean. We just depend on our experience. We depend on our experience just like Thomas.

We look back on our experience, and death is all that we can see. We won't even give life a chance.

If you are angry at someone, do you try to find out about the conflict? Will you come to an understanding of where the differences are? Or do you rely on your experience and say "Why talk? It won't do any good."

If you think someone has let you down, would you rather condemn them and be hurt...or would you give yourself a chance to hear something about life? About death being defeated.

Every time we shut out the possibility of making things better - we shut out life. We have decided death is still in charge, and we will not listen to anything else.

We think how nice it would be to learn new things. To study. Are you excited about that new possibility? Or do you shrug and say, "That's too hard." or "It's not important to understand those things, I've gotten along just fine without it."

When you have the chance to do more or be more...there is the temptation to say, "No, I don't have time. That's not the sort of thing I do. It's too much. I'm not interested." And that is deciding that death is still in charge.

Our experience is death. Thomas had seen death before. And he had seen death come to Jesus. His experience told him that settled the question. We have seen death, we see it creeping through a hundred situations a day, and we are convinced that there is no hope for change.

Think of all the times you hear death. Everytime we hear the words, "I can't trust him." "I can't do that." "That will never work around here." "It's too hard." "I just can't

forgive that." "You know how they are." "That kid is never going to get started." "Those people are never going to change." "Trying to help them is useless."

Every time we hear those words - just substitute these words..."Death is in charge." "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." **I have seen death - and death it is until proven otherwise.**

Thomas is not so different from us. A good man who depended upon his experience. He had never experienced the defeat of death before.

Death is defeated. We can experience it if we will give Jesus the chance.

Experience life. Not just hear about it second hand. We can *know* death is defeated.

Life comes through the experience of what can be. When we think of the possibilities of what can happen...that is life. We know about our criticism of other people, our anger, our fear...we know those things just as clearly as Thomas knew that Jesus had been nailed to the cross. We all have a lot of experience with death.

But are we willing to let a living Christ come to us and prove that death is defeated? Can we know about understanding, and forgiving? Listening, building, growing...These are also believed through experience.

Christ is alive. Death is defeated. This is not a second hand story - not a rumor. Not something we heard and passed it on for what it was worth.

Life is as real as you will let it be.

It was one week after the first Easter. Thomas was with the other disciples. He had been living unconvinced...death was still in charge as far as Thomas' experience told him.

Jesus came to him as he was with all the other disciples and his experience changed. His experience told him death had been defeated.

Today, it is one week after Easter. You are sitting here with the other disciples. Perhaps you have been living unconvinced...Maybe your experience tells you that death is still in charge.

When you have time to think about your life...what do you find there? Do you ever see regret about what went wrong? Is there ever guilt about what you wish could have been different? Do you feel frustrated about problems that aren't going to go away?

That is our experience. Just like Thomas' experience was a dead Jesus on the cross. Death is in charge.

Let Jesus convince you. Instead of regret, think of hope. Look at how you can be alive now. Look at what you can be in the future. Think of the wisdom you have to share with other people.

Think of the strength you can give to people around you who need it. Think of the encouragement, the growing, the forgiving. You can make your life better. You can make the lives around you better.

There is much happiness to be had in this story. When we learn to depend upon our experience...and Jesus comes to us with experiences of life. You know life. Death is defeated and you can bring life to your family, this community, this church. It is your first hand, personal experience that Jesus is interested in. Not just stories of life...real life. The life Jesus is interested in. The life he wants to live with you.

Look at the final paragraph in this morning's Gospel lesson. "...these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

You may have life. Not just hear stories. (Thomas wasn't convinced by stories. We usually aren't either.) You may have life. Death is defeated. You can look into the future and know Jesus - a living, life-giving Jesus - going there with you.