

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Second Sunday of Easter: April 7, 2024

Of Doubts and Doves

Rev. Dr Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Eastertide. Christ has risen. Christ has risen indeed, Alleluia. I want to begin by telling everyone who worked to create our amazing Holy Week, thank you. For those who attended and allowed Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection to enter your hearts, bless you.

So, we start this day with the time after Easter by hearing about Thomas and what happens with him and Jesus in the upper room. And it is a familiar story, but one that we, the church, return to again and again. It is profoundly rich and teaches us so much about the compassion and understanding we lack and that Christ openly displays for us.

So, you can imagine that the disciples originally were locked in the upper room. They were scared. They did not know what to expect. They did not know whether they should go back to their previous jobs. They knew that their leader had been brutally killed. I think they were probably waiting for some Roman centurion to come pounding on the door, calling for them and their lives.

But that isn't what happened, as they were expecting the worst. The very worst. Instead, Jesus appeared among them. And this is just the first part of this gospel where we see that God is the actor in this. He is the one who initiates. God is the one who is moving and making things happen.

Jesus appears in the midst of them and they are overwhelmed with joy and wonder. They can hardly believe what they are seeing. Thomas was not among them. Thomas comes back a little bit later and they tell him with great excitement what they had seen, what they touched.

Thomas reacts a little bit like a resentful child. It's not that he's anxious about this, not that he's struggling about this. He doesn't say any of those things. He says, "I will not, I will not believe." And he names all the specifics. He gives God a list. "God, I'm not going to believe you unless all of these things that I've asked for are fulfilled. And only then will I consider it." Have you ever done this yourself?

And then, of course, we know what happens. That they are meeting again. Jesus appears in their midst. Can you imagine that scene? The disciples, full of wonder all over again. How could this be true a second time? And Thomas is right there. I can easily imagine that Jesus is looking directly across the room and through the crowd to the one person that he had not been able to greet last time.

And Thomas looks up and sees that it is Jesus looking right at him. But I cannot imagine that Jesus' face would be a face of condemnation or anger or anything that would be less than compassionate. Or maybe, imagine that Jesus had some sort of a smile on his face, a smile that said, I know what you have been thinking and I am here to talk to you.

And so Jesus approaches Thomas and says, "See here, touch me, put your hand here in all of these places, these wounds that you are not believing." And Thomas at that point does not need to touch or feel. He already knows. He understands. God has opened his eyes and he calls out "my Lord and my God," and he is filled with joy as well.

Remember that Jesus did not turn away or shun Thomas or say, “You have proven to be an apprentice who did not do his job... away with you.” That may happen on a TV show or some corporate takeover but it does not happen with our Lord. When we call on him, we really do get a response, it is us who often miss the answer. Jesus knew what Thomas needed, he knows what we need.

I love Holy Week, and I try to keep moving so as not to get too engrossed by emotions as I compartmentalize the suffering of Christ; so I can serve in an appropriate way. My most spiritual conversations with God often happen in my car; and I feel constantly in touch with God’s presence for the most part.

The thing in doing ministry is there are multiple things always happening. There is what is happening in your head, the “is my hair ok?” to the “after I step there, I...”, then there is the spiritual part of feeling God’s presence in the midst of community, and then there is the grounding of the body in all the prayers.

For those in the congregation there are similar if not more concerns: from fitting in/doing this right, to understanding and being able to feel the spirit around you. But for a lot of those in ministry, we often long to know that we are doing a good job. And to be honest with you, your congregation saying it takes on a whole other bias.

So yes, I believe Christ has risen just like our disciples believed. He has shown up in many ways in my life, but sometimes at the end of a Holy Week, as you ponder if you really and truly did God’s work, the only answer is a tangible one, much like Thomas.

No big deal; these feelings happen. I’m probably just tired. However, Monday morning after Easter, sitting propped upright on my couch; legs up, firing up the

work tablet for Hospice patients, I took a moment to look my window. My living room has two large ceiling-to-floor windows, and outside the window was a very light gray mourning dove.

I assume there is some type of ledge sticking out far enough on the window sill that the dove perched there for just a moment as it looked at me. It wasn't fluttering or hitting the glass; it wasn't restless or looking for something; it merely looked at me for a few long moments. There was a peace and a grace only Jesus could send. "Peace be with you," Jesus says.

My heart welled, "My Lord and my God!"

I challenge you to consider this Eastertide where you see the risen Christ, because that dove at my window was my thumb in the wound. Amen