

Post Resurrection Stories - Doubting Thomas

John 20:19-29

Sunday, April 11, 2021

Rev. Billy Song - St. Mark's Presbyterian Church

According to the church calendar, today is April 11th the 1st Sunday after Easter.

In many circles, the Sunday after Easter is often called "Low Sunday" and I'm guessing that the reason why it's called that is compared to Easter Sunday, which is "high" energy and "high" celebration, the Sunday *after* Easter can hardly compare.

It might also be called "Low Sunday" because compared to the Easter crowds and record breaking attendance, well, hardly anyone shows up!

This is usually the Sunday where the Pastor goes on vacation and the jr pastor or the youth pastor preaches the sermon and this is usually the Sunday where the choir director and pianist also takes a break!

But Debbie is here and so am I! (at least physically we're here but mentally - well that's another story!)

Several centuries ago, a few churches in Germany started a church tradition where on the Sunday after Easter, they wanted to have some fun!

In light of the resurrection, and how God "had the last laugh" so to speak, preachers started to tell jokes and humorous stories, sort of as a way to recapture how the resurrection was the greatest prank pulled on the devil!

And so to recapture the moment and to bring a bit of levity and put smiles on worshipers faces, a tradition began known as "Risus Paschalis" or the Easter Laughter" which many churches now call "Holy Hilarity Sunday."

So on this 1st Sunday after Easter, also known as "Holy Hilarity Sunday," may I start off by sharing a bit of humor?

A story is told about a new pastor who arrived at a new church, and wanted to know how much the congregation knew about the Bible. So one Sunday morning he asked the congregation what they knew about Easter.

One member raised his hand and said: "Isn't that the holiday where everyone comes over to your house to have this big turkey?"
"Uh uh," said the pastor, "that would be Thanksgiving."

Then a second person raised his hand and said: "Isn't that the holiday where we decorate a big tree and give out presents?"
"Uh uh... stop right there." said the pastor. "That would be Christmas."

Finally, a young woman raised her hand and said: "Isn't that the holiday when they put Jesus on a Cross?"
"Yes - that's the one!" said the pastor "What else can you tell me?"

"Well, He died, right?" she said.
"Yes, - he died. "Can you tell me anything else?"

Then the woman said: "They took Him down, right?"
"Yes, - they took Him down. "Can you tell me anything else?" the pastor asked.

Then the woman said: "They put Him in a cave right?"
"Yes, they put Him in a cave! Can you tell me anything else?" the pastor asked.

Then the woman said: ""Then they rolled away the stone right?"
"Yes, - they rolled away the stone! "Can you tell me anything else?" the pastor asked.

Then the woman said: "Ahhh, it's all coming back to me now... They rolled away the stone and when Jesus came out and saw His shadow, He went back inside the cave & now we have 6 more weeks of winter!"

Oh! I am so fired for telling that one!
(Maybe I should have gone on vacation!)

John 20:19-29

This morning we are looking at a passage that took place on Easter evening, when the disciples were all gathered together and one of the Disciples, the one called Thomas, thought he heard a joke when the other disciples said: *"We have seen the Lord!"*

He probably thought that the others were pulling a prank, but to his surprise it was no joke as he would soon see for himself.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nails marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name."

John 20:19-29

Easter Evening

The day Jesus rose from the grave was hardly a celebration. There were no family gatherings with food around the table; there were no Easter Egg hunts and no front lawns covered with festive decorations.

The passage tells us that on that very first Easter evening, the disciples were "hiding out" together behind closed doors - all because they were afraid of the Jews.

Why would they be afraid of the Jews?

Well, in those days, when you crucified the leader of an assumed revolution, you also put to death any known associates. And so on the day of the Resurrection, instead of being joyful and celebrating the Good News, they disciples hid in fear behind locked doors, not wanting to be identified.

This was the context in which our story took place. It was perhaps around 12 hours after He rose from the grave when Jesus made His first appearance to the disciples.

But Thomas wasn't there.

But then our passage tells us that one of the disciples Thomas, wasn't there when Jesus made His first appearance. The passage doesn't tell us why he wasn't there or where Thomas was. Perhaps he was getting food for the group or perhaps Thomas was the look out or it was his turn to keep watch.

For whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus made His first appearance, and so when he walked into the house, the other disciples said in unison "We have seen the Lord!"

But what was Thomas' response? Did he jump up and down and say: *"Tell me more!"* Not exactly. Thomas said: *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe it."*

In other words, Thomas said: *"Nice try fellas! You almost had me fooled!"*

Why Did Thomas Doubt?

A lot of people are quick to judge Thomas because of what he said in the passage. Even later on - when Jesus finally showed up, Jesus said to him, *"Stop doubting and believe."*

And because of what Jesus said, the church has given Thomas the nick-name "Doubting Thomas," which I think is unfortunate and a little unfair.

Because all Thomas said was that he wanted a little proof; that what the disciples were saying was entirely true. He wanted a little evidence. He wanted to see with his own eyes and confirm that what they disciples were saying had indeed happened.

Is there anything wrong with that?

What's in the bag?

As you all know, the economy is opening back up!

Many students are back in the classrooms; many people are back in the office; the gyms have re-opened, the restaurants have reopened, and soon, our church will re-open our doors for worship in the sanctuary! But last year was a completely different story.

One thing I remember about last year, is that we didn't eat out a whole lot. (We weren't allowed to if you remember the restrictions.) We didn't eat out a lot, but we sure did a lot of take out.

In fact, a lot of our favorite restaurants went to a take-out only model, and we were more than happy to order take out and enjoy their food from the comfort and safety of our own home.

So it became a pattern in our home. A few times a week - we would order take out from some of the local restaurants, and what I started to notice was that on more than 1 or 2 occasions, is that "what" I ordered on the phone wasn't necessarily what was in the bag.

Sometimes they would get my order wrong and put in a wrong item, other times they would give me someone else's order, and when I got home and took out the food, instead of mashed potatoes - there might be green beans, or instead of French fries - there might be onion rings, and when that happened, I had to go back to the restaurant and place a whole new order, and by the time I got back home I was super hungry.

So I got into this little habit when I picked up the food, I would verbally confirm what I ordered, then I would look in the bag to make sure everything was there. I would peek into the containers to make sure it was what I ordered.

And unless I touched the chicken drumsticks in my hands,
and until I could feel the warmth coming from the hot biscuits
and until I could smell the coleslaw and the mashed potatoes,
I will not believe that this is the Family Meal Special!

So my experiences this past year has taught me in regards to take out,
is to always confirm with my own eyes - what they say is in the bag.
I'm not going to believe - just because I am told. I need verification!

Now, if some of you want to call me "Doubting Billy" I'm ok with that!
It doesn't mean that I have no faith in Kentucky Fried Chicken, or that
I'm not going to order there anymore, all it means is that I want to see with
my own eyes - what my ears have already heard - before I taste with my own
lips!

The World is full of Thomas'

Well, that got me thinking. There are probably a lot of "doubting Thomas"
out in the world today - more than we'd like to think.

And what I mean by that, is not that there are people out there who double
check their take-out orders, but skeptics who don't always believe what
people say - "just because" the church says it.

People, who want more than rhetoric.

People who want more than a good sermon.

People, who want more than high energy music and nice flowing hymns.

People who want to hear more than words,

more than historical creeds and more than fancy prayers,

and people who want to see some scars and want to know what the church's
hands look like.

Perhaps you know a few "doubting Thomas" who need more than just words.

I heard a great quote many years ago on a Christian radio station.
I can't remember who said it but the quote went like this:

**People don't care how much you KNOW,
until they know how much you CARE.**

I think that also goes for churches too.

People don't care how big our church buildings are,
until they know what we do with our buildings.

People don't care how many programs we have,
until they know that our programs are for them.

People don't care how many people can sit in the sanctuary, until they know
and until they see, and until they are touched by the love of God displayed
by the members of that church.

But then Jesus showed up.

One week later in our passage, Jesus reappeared to the disciples, but this
time Thomas was in the room.

Remember, it still wasn't safe to be walking around as a disciple, this was
even one week after the resurrection. Truth be told, it wasn't safe for
Christians for quite a long time to identify themselves as followers.

Anyways, Jesus reappeared to the disciples again and this time Thomas is
with them, and so the first thing Jesus did was to address the doubter in
the room!

He said to Thomas: *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand
and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

In other words, Jesus said to Thomas: "Check out the goods!" "Put your hands on the merchandise!" "Feel the scars. Touch the wounds" "Stop doubting and start believing that I am the resurrection and the life!"

Sometimes that's all it takes to silence the doubters and quiet the critics,
You have to show them your hands!

Sometimes that's all it takes for people to let down their guard and to start trusting again - you have to open up your arms and show them your hands!

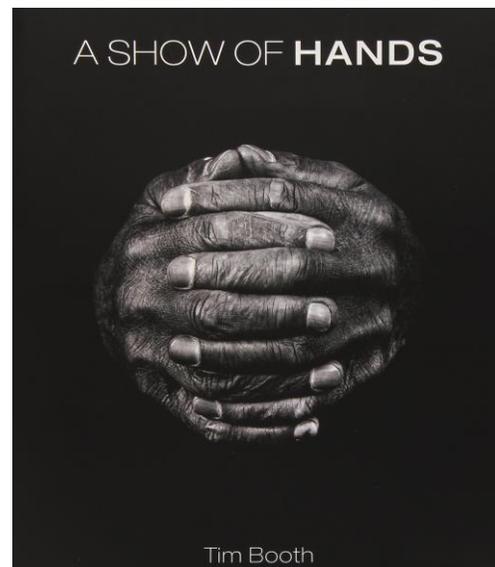
Hands tell our story

There's an amazing photographer by the name of Tim Booth who published this beautiful book called "A Show of Hands."

It's a picture book that showcases the hands of some famous (and not so famous people) and the pictures are just stunning.



These are the hands of Frank Suarez -
a car mechanic





These are the hands of
Rosemary Verey
- a gardener



These are the hands of
David Sale - Lobsterman



And these are the hands
of Connie Colfox
- horsetrainer.

Aren't these pictures stunning?

Every picture and every pair of hands tells a story about each person.
Some of the hands show what they do for a living, other pairs of hands show
what they love doing.

One pair of hands loves to work in the dirt,
another pair of hands loves working on cars,
another works with horses, another catches lobsters.

If I were to ask you to take a picture of your hands,
"What would they say about you?"

Well, in our passage, when Thomas doubted the good news that Jesus had risen from the grave, Jesus extended His hands and showed Thomas what they looked like.



They showed the price He paid.
They showed the love He demonstrated.
They showed the scars and the wounds that paid for our transgressions.
And from that moment on, Thomas believed and never doubted again.

Show your Hands - St. Mark's !

My charge to you St. Mark's is to show the world your hands!

Let them see the way you *serve*,
Let them see the way you *love*,
Let them see the way you *care*.

This coming Saturday, there's a work party at our church,
come on out and get your hands dirty.

Someone once said:

*"Show me a church that isn't afraid to get a little dirt on their hands,
and I'll show you a church that is planting faith right there in the community.*

*Show me a church that isn't afraid to get their feet wet,
and I'll show you a church that has learned how to walk on water!*

*Show me a church that doesn't mind getting a little dirty
and I'll show you a church that is ready to change the world!*

What does the "hands of our church"
say about the Lord that we love/serve?

St. Teresa of Avila

There is a wonderful poem written by St. Teresa of Avila which you may have heard before.

CHRIST HAS NO BODY.

*Christ has no body but yours,
NO hands, not feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks,
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,
Might I be the hands of Christ - extended to a doubting world.
Might I be the hands of Christ - serving a selfish world.
Might I be hands that hold those who are alone,
Might I be hands that protect those who are afraid,
Might I be hands that care for those who are injured,
Might I be hands that support those who are unstable.
Might I be the hands of Christ, the feet, the eyes, the ears too,
and that the body of Christ here at St. Mark's
be Christ-like into this world.

Amen