

Second Sunday in Easter ≅ Year A
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
April 3, 2005

The Rest of the Story

Lessons for the Day

- ✧ Psalm 111 or 118:19-24
- ✧ Acts 2:14a, 22-32 or Genesis 8:6-16; 9:8-16
- ✧ 1 Peter 1:3-9 or Acts 2:14a, 22-32
- ✧ John 20:19-31

Homily

I greet you in the name of **God our Creator, Christ our Brother**, and the **Holy Spirit** who sustains us and empowers us to love and serve them both. (Pause)

Amen.

And now for the rest of the story . . .

Radio broadcaster Paul Harvey has a pretty good gig going, teasing us with half of a story -- often the half we know least-well -- and then leaving us hanging while he breaks for a commercial or two. We anxiously await his return, wanting to know "*the rest of the story*".

We -- you and I -- **made it through Holy Week with Jesus**. We enjoyed the triumph of Palm Sunday and experienced Christ's outrage in the clearing of the temple. We remembered Christ's washing of the disciples' feet and His institution of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday.

We walked with Christ into Gethsemane, where he was betrayed. And then we remembered all the dizzying events of the next, horrific twenty-four hours: arrest, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, and beatings. And finally, the long and painful walk to Golgotha, and the agonizing death on the cross.

We walked through all of this in our Easter remembrance: the death on the cross, the hurried removal of the body to prepare and bury it before sundown and the Sabbath, the borrowed tomb, and the deep sadness of all those who loved Christ.

We waited through that long, sad Saturday and then -- last Sunday Morning -- we rejoiced in the triumphant news of Easter Sunday:

"Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia."

Easter Vigil, BCP, page 294

Christ is up and out of the grave; death has been conquered.

And now for the rest of the story! And "*the rest of the story*" -- as Paul Harvey would name it -- gives us pause.

We pick up the narrative right here in today's gospel reading. "When it was evening on *that* day . . ." the Gospel of John says, and the Gospel is talking about Easter day -- the very day on which Christ rose from the dead.

The disciples are locked away behind closed doors, afraid of the Jewish authorities. **Jesus passes through the locked doors and greets them** with the traditional Hebrew greeting: "**Peace be with you!**" **Christ shows them the wounds** in his hands and his side, and then **he commends** them to go:

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

John 20:21b NRSV

And then **Christ speaks to the disciples of the Holy Spirit and of forgiveness**, two messages that convey the truth that -- without God's help -- none among us can forgive.

Finally we get to meet Didymus -- the twin -- also known as Thomas, and seared irrevocably into our minds as **doubting** Thomas. And we all know that story . . . or we think we do . . .

Thomas is the prototype Twenty-first century Christian: his is a data-driven faith. And so -- in John 20:25b -- he asks for the facts:

"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."

John 20:25b (NRSV)

But here's **the rest of the story** . . . the part that is perhaps less-familiar to us all.

Earlier in the Gospel of John -- in Chapter 11, right smack in the midst of the Lazarus story -- **Thomas also pops up**. And this time he is **not tainted with the brush of doubt**, but rather **painted with the flush of courage** -- intrepid when faced with the possibility of his own death.

In Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John, Jesus knows of Lazarus' death and makes plans to return to Judea so that Lazarus might be healed. Some of the **disciples try to dissuade Jesus:**

"Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"

John 11:8b NRSV

And then -- a few verses later -- we hear from our old friend Thomas. But this time **Thomas speaks not with doubt, but with certainty:**

"Let us also go, that we may die with him!"

John 11:16b NRSV

And there's **"the rest of the story"** -- the surprise turn, the unexpected misdirection that always hooks us and keeps us hanging on until the end. **Doubting Thomas might well be called Shouting Thomas:**

"Let us also go, that we may die with him!"

John 11:16b NRSV

So **what do make of this contrast** -- this juxtaposition of courageous Thomas with doubting Thomas?

How and where do we find ourselves in this story?

Perhaps **Thomas shows us something about our own humanity** in presenting his all-too-human response to the risen Christ. We are in **all parts** of this story -- **we are by turns intrepid and doubting**.

When **Christ is clearly visible**, Thomas is **intrepid and fearless** -- willing to go to Judea and die with Christ.

When **Christ is apparently absent** -- when God seems very, very dead indeed -- Thomas' **faith wavers and gives way to doubt** -- a doubt we have all tasted.

Let me say one final thing about doubt, and about me, and perhaps even about you.

Many people -- people far smarter than me -- have **tried to tease out the relationship between faith and doubt**. On first blush the two **seem like polar opposites** -- anchoring **opposing ends of one continuum**. But closer examination rebuts this notion.

Faith and doubt are not opposites -- they are Siamese Twins, joined at the hip in our life of belief. **Doubt is a part of our faith** -- for our **doubt only disappears when we know**. And **knowing requires no faith**.

So doubt is nothing to fear -- nor is it anything to give in to. Just acknowledge your doubt with a happy wave, and keep on moving like Thomas -- ready to die with Christ in Judea.

And now a **final word about our friend Thomas**. The balance of the **disciples did not doubt because they had already seen Christ's wounds**. They were not such paragons of faith; they just already had their proof.

Why didn't Thomas have proof? Because (as we've seen in today's Gospel reading) **Thomas wasn't there** with the other disciples when Christ appeared for the first time. He wasn't cowering behind locked doors in fear of the Jews. Who knows -- perhaps he was out being intrepid again -- **ready to die for sure** with Christ this time.

It is fear that is the opposite of faith -- not doubt.

Unlock the doors. Befriend your doubts. Proclaim the good news of Christ crucified.

"Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia."

Easter Vigil, BCP, page 294

AMEN