

“Resurrected and Never the Same”

John 20:19-31

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“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.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.’

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.’ 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.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ 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.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so 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.” This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

I was trying so hard last Sunday to have a normal Easter morning. I curled my hair to do something special. We ate hot cross buns for breakfast. I went outside to see those familiar azaleas in my yard blooming, just like they usually do around Easter. I woke up hoping to feel the feelings I had felt last Easter when we all gathered together to celebrate Jesus rising from the dead.

But, of course, nothing about this Easter was normal. I didn't bother curling the back of my hair because I knew you wouldn't see it on Zoom. Our hot cross buns were delicious, but they had been kindly dropped off by friends a couple days before, friends we might have spent Easter evening with, but who I know we won't see in person for quite some time as we practice physical distancing. I enjoyed the azaleas blooming in my yard, but I picked some of them this year to adorn the cross in our makeshift living room sanctuary. I was teary as I taped them to the cross, because I was missing the Easter lilies in our sanctuary. I put on that same Easter dress I love so much, but I never put on shoes, because I was staying home instead of going to be with all of you in person. I spent the morning trying not to feel the grief because I wanted to feel the joy instead. I kept telling myself, “Liz, you can keep feeling the sadness of Good Friday or you can embrace Easter morning, the familiar joy you've always felt on this day.” I

kept trying and it wasn't working. And I kept wondering to myself, "How am I supposed to lay down my grief so that I can embrace resurrection?"

This is the question I brought with me to this familiar text from John 20. I wondered how the disciples approached the task of laying down the deep grief and trauma of Jesus' execution in order to welcome his resurrection. I watched for ways they were able to put away the pain and embrace new life. But as I read closely, I found something else instead: I found Thomas. Thomas has long been remembered for his alleged doubt. But what I noticed about Thomas this week was something different. We read that he missed that first time Jesus appeared to the disciples in that locked room, when Jesus shows the disciples his wounds and breathes on them the Holy Spirit, declaring to them, "Peace be with you." And I noticed for the first time how strange it is that Thomas would demand to see and to touch the *wounds* of Jesus in order to believe. Why wasn't it enough for Thomas to simply say, "I need to see Jesus appear to me like he did to the others to believe he has risen"? His focus on the wounds of Jesus as a condition for his belief, his demand to touch Jesus' wounds in order to embrace resurrection had never struck me in years past. But this year, it pierced my heart. Because maybe Thomas wasn't asking for proof of Jesus' resurrection when he was asking to see and touch the wounds. Maybe Thomas simply wouldn't settle for feeling the grief of the cross or the joy of resurrection life because he knew that to live into this resurrection, the grief and pain of all that had happened would need to be woven into this new reality. I wonder if Thomas knew that resurrection life was not about choosing one emotion over the other, but was instead about

welcoming both to the table - grief AND joy, pain AND hope, loss AND new life.

And as I sat with that perspective this week, I realized it is the good news I've been needing to hear in this season. Last Sunday, I woke up clinging to the false hope that I could choose the joy instead of the grief, that I could choose one emotion over the other. But I was tearing myself in two trying to do so. And the good news is that the risen Christ never asked this of us. Because the risen Christ didn't appear to his disciples as he was before he went to the cross and he didn't appear to them as a flawless, shining body of perfection. The first things Jesus showed his disciples in his risen body were his wounds, not just as proof that it was really him, but perhaps so that they would know that resurrection is not about choosing between this pain or that joy. Resurrection is welcoming both as inseparable friends. Resurrection touches the wounds AND beholds a body that is somehow raised to new life. Resurrection says, "The world is not as it should be AND there is joy." Resurrection says, "The worst of humanity has been laid bare AND Jesus is here." Resurrection says, "Nothing will ever be the same AND Jesus is alive."

And that's what I hear in Thomas - a refusal to leave behind the trauma and grief of what has happened in order to accept resurrection and an insistence that resurrection must be wrapped around what happened at the cross. So when I hear Jesus say 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,' I hear Jesus saying, "Thomas, you really do understand what resurrection means. It means naming and acknowledging all we have been

through AND welcoming the new thing God is doing. You have found it, Thomas, the strange path of resurrection living.”

Maybe you’ve been like me and said things like, “I can’t wait for things to go back to normal someday soon.” There’s no shame in that - we all long for the familiar ways we have of being human, for those comforting patterns of life as a Church family that have formed us and shaped us. But I wonder if there is a call to the Church in this passage for this strange time we live in. This past month has been its own kind of crucifixion. So many people, dreams, and hopes have been delayed or have died. The cracks in our country, in our racially and economically biased healthcare system, in our relationships, in our own broken hearts have been laid bare. There are things that we cannot unknow, even though I’ve felt tempted to try.

But resurrection life is not going back to the way things were. And this, friends, is good news for those of us who feel lost in grief AND filled with joy AND disheartened AND grateful AND anxious AND hopeful all in the same 24-hour period. It is into this strange, uncharted territory, where wounds are an integral part of the risen life of Christ, that God is making something new we could not have previously imagined. Thomas has led the way for us, showing us that the new life God is creating is one where our wounds are not erased, but transformed.

So this week, I will let myself enjoy the blooming spring flowers even as I gaze at them sometimes through the tears. And I hope you’ll welcome the wounds of your grief with the joy of resurrection too. Because Christ is risen. And life will never be the same. Amen.