

John 20: 19-31 “Wound Check” Rev. Janet Chapman 4/26/20

You parents will agree with me when I tell you there is a reason we teach our kids not to play with sharp objects. That doesn't stop when they turn 25... Mikayla bought a much-awaited and fervently sought after Ninja blender this week, and then proceeded to nearly cut her pinkie off with the blades. I am exaggerating, but it did produce a good amount of blood giving us reason to ponder whether it needed stitches? In a time of COVID, one weighs the pros and cons of entering an urgent care or ER, so we decided to wait it out and am happy to report it is healing well after multiple wound checks. Her wound is living proof that those Ninja blades mean business, and along with other previous experiences of slicing her hand open, becomes good story fodder.

Our Bible story today involves the apostle Thomas, who is blamed for seeking proof that Christ's wounds are real, yet somehow recognizes the significance of wounds to be powerful storytellers. Poor Thomas – he has been called the skeptic, the doubter, the one whom Jesus seemingly chastises for having to see in order to believe. But I really don't think he is all that bad. Imagine being him, walking into the upper room, and everyone says, “OMG, guess who was just here? Jesus – He breathed into our faces! Well, ok that was kinda weird, but then he showed us his wounds – it was really him!” Maryann McKibben Dana invites us to see that Jesus freely provides a glimpse of himself, open wounds and all. But Thomas wasn't there...we don't know where he was in those days following the resurrection. Maybe, he was back to work already – no time nor patience for stay-at-home orders, no matter how dangerous it is. Maybe, rather than the patron saint of doubters, he was the patron saint of the chronically late – if you have ever been a day late and a dollar short, Thomas is your man. Maybe he is simply

the most honest and bravest of the apostles, saying what everybody else was afraid to say, asking the questions everybody else wanted to ask. After all, back in chapter 11, he is the one who urged the disciples to go with Jesus to Lazarus' tomb even though it might spell their own deaths. In chapter 14, when Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you and you know the way there," Thomas is the one to say, "Hey wait, we don't know where you are going, how then can we know the way?" I like David Lose's perspective as he summarizes Thomas as a pragmatist, one who likes his truth straight up and who relentlessly takes stock of the situation before making a decision. You can count on Thomas, but you'd better not be false with him, because Thomas doesn't suffer fools easily. Sounds like the kind of person we could use in these times, don't you think?

Thomas' matter of fact approach is taken in stride by Jesus who doesn't appear threatened or challenged. Thomas doesn't even have to ask Jesus directly for proof as Jesus walks right in, bids them peace, and says, "Here Thomas, put your hand here and touch." It is as if Thomas' questioning is the most natural thing in the world. In fact, the word for faith and the word for doubt come from the same Greek root. It is as if they are two sides of the same coin. It is as if you can't have one with the other. If your faith doesn't have any doubt mixed in, it's not faith, it's certainty. And it can be hazardous to be certain of yourself, to be haughty about your perceptions, especially when it comes to the God of the universe – you are just asking for trouble. Frederick Buechner says, "Whether your faith says there is a God or not, if you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving." Doubts play a necessary role in our faith and are present among even the most faithful. The following thoughts were penned in a journal

several years ago: “There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. When I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. I am told God loves me – and yet the reality of darkness, coldness, and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. Did I make a mistake?” This honest questioning is not a sign of a failing faith but of a genuine wrestling with God in the midst of struggle. These forthright words come from none other than Mother Teresa in her book, “Come Be My Light,” which reveals a woman who inspired millions by her compassion and mercy with the sick and dying but was wounded herself, tormented by depression, isolation, and feelings of God’s absence. Certainly, if Mother Teresa could experience such things, questioning her relationship with God and perception of reality, no one is immune. Teresa asks if she has made a mistake, Thomas asks to check Jesus’ wounds – reassurance is needed as well as a new perception of reality itself. Thomas, like all of us, needs a wider perspective of what is possible, of what God can do, even of what God can do through him. Easter is an experience which forever changes the perspective of what God can do.

Some discount Thomas’ request to check Jesus’ wounds as gruesome, even sadistic. I wonder instead if John is opening a door to his community, and to us who have come later with regards to understanding the power of resurrection. Those wounds, the nail holes and pierced side, are epicenters of pain. They are symbols of darkness and death that are transformed in the light of resurrection. Gordon Lathrop once said, “You don’t have to knock very hard on any door in your church to find some sort of agony behind that door.” Knock on a door and you’ll probably find a woman who is being or has been abused, most often by her partner. And you’ll find little boys with big eyes watching what Daddy is doing to Mommy, being homeschooled to

be future abusers. And you'll hear the woman explain, "It doesn't happen that often. I know he loves me. I'm afraid of what he would do to the kids if I left. I have no skills or friends. Everything is in his name. I have nowhere to go." This is an epicenter of pain. Knock on another door and you will find a single parent struggling to make ends meet, raising a 10 year old, and dreading the call to return to work as a housekeeper in the COVID unit. What will happen if she gets sick? Who will care for her child? How will the bills get paid? This is an epicenter of pain. Keep knocking and you will find more and more. Living in the days after Easter, we have to keep looking into the epicenters of pain, the wounded places of the world. Richard Rohr notes that our story today is not about believing in the fact of the resurrection, but a story about believing that someone could be wounded and also resurrected at the same time. The reality that we can indeed be wounded and resurrected at the same time may be the primary message of the whole Gospel. Now more than ever before, we need to be in touch with people who are wounded, people who are down and out, people who are poor, people the world has forgotten... because that is where Jesus said he would be. We need to conduct wound checks periodically because that is exactly where we will find God working to bring healing and resurrection. Just as Thomas put his hand in Jesus' wounds and exclaimed, "My Lord and My God," we too shall enter that woundedness and pain and meet the resurrected Christ.

Andrew King, scholar and poet, penned a prophetic summary of Thomas and an expanding perspective of resurrection which I'd like to share: "Thomas knows all about crucifixion. Knows the nails driven into the victim really tear the flesh, damage the bones. And he knows that this is a crucifying world, with all its violence, greed, and oppression still

hammering nails into the hands of justice, still thrusting spears through the ribs of love, still hanging mercy and kindness to die and sealing up the tomb. Thomas knows all about it. So he knows that any real resurrection will have to come out ruin, will have to come out of suffering, will have to come out still bearing the scars inflicted by the unjust world...Thomas wants to see the Lord who rises from death by crucifixion, who rises from the worst that our world can do: who rises from hells of corruption and cruelty, who rises from rape and torture and war, who rises from hunger and (pandemic) and chaos, who rises torn and terribly scarred yet walking among us still, who will touch us in our woundedness, who will hold us in our brokenness, who sees in us the prints left by the nails, who puts his own hurt hands upon our heartache, and breathes his healing peace into our souls. This is who Thomas wants to see – the only Messiah he wants to believe in. Thomas just wants to see Jesus.” So like Thomas, we look to the wounds of the world and find the courage and honesty to proclaim, “My Lord and my God!”