

A Sermon by the Reverend Mother Crystal J. C. Hardin
The Second Sunday of Easter (Year A)
Sunday, April 19, 2020

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Like many of you, I am currently living a reality I never envisioned. This is true in many ways, but in one way in particular: I am now homeschooling two elementary aged children, and not all that successfully I might add.

The first week of it saw me ignoring my duties entirely. The second week of it found me over-functioning, creating complex schedules that were never going to work, trying to control what I could. Frankly, I can't even remember the third week. By the fourth week, reality hit and I realized that I could neither ignore it nor perfect it. Now I'm just getting by on most days, with a few A+ days sprinkled in and a few failed ones as well.

I'm telling you this really to justify the next thing I'm about to say, or at least to provide some context. Because, I want to talk about conjunctions. Yes, like those bits of grammar that you forgot what they were called until you had to help with a fourth grade worksheet, perhaps. Or, maybe that's just me.

I think, due to my homeschooling efforts this week, all I could see in today's Gospel were conjunctions: two in particular. The first, *but* as in, *but wait*. The second, *and*, as in, *and yet*.

On the second Sunday of Easter without fail our lectionary gives us this story from the Gospel of John: the one where Jesus appears in a locked room suddenly to his fearful disciples; the one where Thomas appears to doubt.

It begins of course,

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 (John 20:19).

The story begins at an end: the end of the day. Jesus has been crucified, and with him, the hope of those who believed. But wait, it's also the beginning. The first day of the week, and Jesus is Risen. And things will never be the same, which means that much has ended. Which means, there is grief, situated right alongside hope and joy.

And, the story begins with fear. The disciples huddle together, isolated. The doors are locked tight. It is dark. And yet, *Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* (John 20:19)

Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried, now stands among them, gifting them peace, bringing light to the darkness, profound and uncontrollable contact to their isolation. It is, truly, a miracle of another order. He is risen.

But wait, *after this, he showed them his hands and his side* (John 20:20). Jesus showed them his wounds, his wounded-ness, his very personhood, as if to say, yes, what you are seeing is real. What you are seeing is an other-worldly miracle *and yet* it is as real as what happened on the cross, as real as these wounds that you see on my body, as real as the grief which gripped your hearts and might grip them still.

Everything has changed *and yet* nothing is erased.

Now, here's where we get to Thomas, that beloved Saint of doubt. The others tried to tell him. *We have seen the Lord* (and, I'm guessing that they said it with some conviction). And yet, he hadn't seen. He wasn't with them. He could not believe.

Instead, he sets the conditions under which he could be made to believe: *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 20:25).

That's where Jesus found Thomas – in that in-between space where the reality of what he knew to be true (Jesus, crucified) was slowly dying to something new, something yet unknown but promising, perhaps. Frightening, probably. Impossible, certainly. (Jesus, resurrected).

Thomas might be remembered best for his doubt, but I think there is something else going on here. Something really important.

My Lord and My God, Thomas says to Jesus (John 20:28). *My Lord and My God*. Some have noted that, with these words, Thomas may have been the first disciple to worship Jesus Christ. And yet, he could not get there without an acknowledgment of the reality of Good Friday.

As preacher Sam Candler notes, "It is Thomas who makes it clear, that unless it is the wounded Christ who is [offering peace] then he will not believe. It has to be the Christ who has holes in his hands and a tear in his side! Otherwise, the peace, it's worthless. Fake.

There is no resurrected Christ without a wounded Christ. . . . And, it is only because our Lord is a wounded Lord that he can bring us peace.”¹

Thomas, perhaps, is just making sure that we don't get ahead of ourselves. That we don't, in our rush to celebrate the risen Christ, forget what it cost. As if to say, *but wait* true resurrection requires, somehow, an acknowledgment of our suffering, of our wounded-ness, of our limitations, of our pain.

Everything has changed, and yet nothing is erased.

I wonder if there's a lesson here for you and for me as we walk through these uncertain times. I'm not sure when the doors to our isolation will be thrown open. But, I am sure that there will be a million and one things tempting us to forget. To get back to normal, to a time before all this. To overlook what was uncovered - pain, our own limitations and lack of control, grief, suffering – to ignore our wounds altogether in a hurry to resume our busy lives. In truth, the risk is not just that we will overlook and ignore the negative, it is that we will also overlook and ignore the positive that came with it: the goodness and generosity and connectivity and humility that flowered in these uncertain times. The wounds and the balms all tied up together.

Or, will we start right now to make meaning out of this crisis; to notice what we are feeling and to name it and offer it to God. To carry it forward with us and allow these dark times and all that we learned from them to be the beginning of something new. Not a return to normal, but a new way, a more life-giving, life-sustaining way of living.

One where we continue to reach out, to deepen connections, to offer help and to accept it, to take comfort in simple things, to count our blessings and to share our pain, to witness to the suffering of others, to fix what appears to be broken and unjust, to leave in the past those things we now realize we might be best doing without, and to continue those practices that are bringing us life. To live more simply. To love more fully.

I pray that is so.

Amen.

¹ Samuel Candler, “Robert Shaw and Doubting Thomas,” a sermon delivered at the Cathedral of St. Philip, Atlanta, Georgia (April 15, 2007), <https://www.cathedralatl.org/Sermons/robert-shaw-and-doubting-thomas/>.