

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen.*

Do you ever question your faith? Do you ever wonder if what your heart tells you about Jesus is really true? Are you reluctant to question your faith, thinking that it might somehow offend God, that God might just turn his back on you because of it and walk away shaking his head with disappointment and disgust? Are you afraid that you might make God angry, and that God's absence from your life would leave you defenseless and doomed? Well, my advice is to lighten-up! God is big enough to endure your questioning; Christ is man enough to take it on the chin for you once in a while. I mean, you don't need to be stubborn about it, or sarcastic, and nobody really loves a cynic...well, except God. God is love, and Christ is the embodiment of God's grace, they say, and forgiveness is his way of life, so fear not, God is a parent who would never disown a child for asking questions about reality, even cynical ones, I guess, or even questions which seem a bit inappropriate. And, moreover, questioning is how we learn the whole truth, isn't it? And might it not be a great joy to God that we care enough to ask, and that our asking shows that God is on our minds at all?!

Questioning our faith gives God the opportunity to reveal something to us, maybe even some new thing which hadn't even occurred to us. Maybe even that we were misinformed about some very important things. Have you ever felt the presence of God change your mind about something? Has God's still, small voice ever helped you find a new perspective? Has God's love ever overwhelmed you so personally that you see as if with a new light, that you recognize something in yourself or someone else you didn't know was there? Questioning your faith in God's dream, even innocently and with subtlety, may have made that possible. It sounds ironic, I know, but that's the empty tomb for you...a pitch black hole in the ground which will stay that way until someone's strength can roll aside the obstacle blocking the light, until someone makes a request and asks a question. Until someone takes the time to pray.

So, what the heck is wrong with Thomas, anyway?! The rest of the posse has recognized Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and are insistent that he doesn't need to question their discovery but that he can simply take their word for it. Jesus has returned from death, they say, and has come among them. They have no doubt, and neither should Thomas. Come to the upper room tonight, and you'll see for sure, Thomas! Don't be stubborn, don't be reluctant, you'll see that we're right. You can depend on us and our grasp of reality, don't be a stick-in-the mud, or even a 'doubting Thomas'. So, as we have read today in John's Gospel, Thomas does come to that gathering, and has watched with surprise as Jesus, his old friend and teacher, enters the room even though the door is shut and probably locked tight. They have trudged the backroads of Galilee and the urban streets of Jerusalem tougher all this time, and yet Jesus remains unrecognizable to him. How can that be? If it were me, I think that seeing my good friend who was verifiably dead just walk in, I'd have been ready to believe anything, like maybe even that the moon could block out the sun!

Did Jesus shave off his beard overnight? Is he wearing designer sunglasses? Has he been to the hairdresser? Why can't Thomas recognize him right away? Behind what possible disguise could Jesus be hiding his identity? How did the other disciples know him? How was his identity revealed to them? Could it be more what he said and did than by how he looked? Sure, we can say it was because of the wounds, that they were adequate evidence and gave irrefutable proof. And Jesus even offers Thomas the opportunity to investigate the evidence, something much more intimate than one might expect from the very Son of Almighty God! And, without a doubt, the testimony of the wounds, the awful scars, would have been sufficiently convincing, but I wonder if it was more than just that which touched Thomas' soul and inspired him to make probably the most spontaneous and emphatic testimony about reality in all of scripture. He looks at Jesus and blurts out "My Lord and my God!"

Was it just the weeping sores which have enlightened him? Let me ask a question about faith and reality, permit me to open a can of worms, and let's just see if earthquake, lightning, or permanent eclipse of sunlight will punish me for my inquiring mind! Deprived now of the ability to physically touch the crucified and resurrected body of our Master, how will we recognize his presence? How will we know that he is among us now and abides with us forever? What was it, really, that caused the disciples to identify their teacher on those blessed occasions of his appearance? Hear what he says to them: "My peace be with you; receive the Holy Spirit." Those lost and miserable followers, Thomas included, adrift in chaos and brimming over with fear, hear him offer his most precious 'peace' to come among them. He passes the peace of God.

And so, teaches our faith, he does with us too in our generation. At times of distress, and tragedy, even at times of death, the presence of Jesus extends to us peace which passes all understanding, which can be so unexpected and so relieving. I think that it was truly the way the disciples recognized Jesus for who he really was that night, and what caused Thomas to make his unsolicited proclamation that Jesus, the one who had come to them in love, was indeed Lord and God. And if he hadn't questioned his faith, he might never have felt the power or fully appreciated the gift of the Spirit they were all being given. It was the channeling of God's eternal peace which opened their eyes and their hearts, wasn't it? It was the dream made tangible in the loving person of the Christ which overwhelmed them in those moments. But what about our moments [has anyone felt a suspicious earthquake yet?], both our moments of joy and our times of fear? Will Jesus come among us bringing peace? What do you think? What do you hope for?

The disciples may have thought they needed forgiveness for abandoning and denying Jesus during the trial and execution. His passing of the peace covered that disloyalty. They may have thought that their emptiness and doubt about the Resurrection was sinful and lazy. His passing of the peace absolved them of that guilt. Mysteriously and miraculously, Jesus comes to them. They didn't have to beg him. No, apparently we can expect that God will take the initiative. But praying and requesting and questioning keep us on watch for his coming, keep us alert to his approach. Though we might lock our doors of access, Jesus will find a way in, and the Spirit he carries will lay the divine dream out before us, as only one who has experienced Resurrection truly can. Amen and Alleluia.