

Moderator's Online Worship for Sunday, April 19, 2020

John 20:19-31

Reflection on Scripture:

You know, I really feel for Thomas. The only one of the group of disciples that had been with Jesus on his ministry – out doing something when Jesus show up.

The disciples had sequestered themselves in the upper room, worried that the authorities were on the lookout for them, to arrest them for sedition against the Roman Empire, too. I sometimes wonder what Thomas was doing, out and about. Did he have people to see? Was he taking care of essential business? Was he checking to see if the authorities were really searching for followers of Jesus' Way?

Well, for whatever reason, he wasn't there when Jesus appeared before the disciples. He wasn't there to see what had happened – to experience the presence of the risen Christ.

I have to wonder how long he politely smiled as the other disciples, nodding his head, thinking, "Yeah. Right. Grief. Does strange things to a body, eh?" How long did he listen to the disciples tell the story of what they experienced, over and over – "What were you doing when he appeared?" "Oh, I was playing dice with Peter – had won him taking over dish washing duty for a week!" "Yeah, I was just staring out the window, bored silly, when I heard the commotion." "Didn't he look great?" "For having been crucified, he looked amazing!" and on and on... until he finally had to say, "Ok. Stop it! I don't know what you're up to, but until I can see him... no – until I can touch the wounds the spikes made in his wrists, and put my hand on the side where they speared him, I just can't believe you!"

I don't particularly like the fact that we've given Thomas (whose nickname was "The Twin") a different moniker – "Doubting Thomas." Of course he doubted! He hadn't had the same experience as the rest of the group!

I'm a lot like Thomas. As much as I love learning from other people's stories, other people's experiments, other people's experiences – I find that on the really big questions in my life, I *need* to experience them for myself, before I can believe in answer. I like to use my own senses to be able to test the truth in a claim. Even when I have the sense that it's probably true - "The water's cold." Dip my toe in. "Sure is!"

I'm not sure that's doubting, as much as it's holding up extraordinary claims to the light, to test them, and see where the issues are with them.

For me, questions and doubt are an integral part of my faith in Jesus Christ. They challenge me to continue to learn, to continue to seek out experiences, to continue to grow my relationships with others who have experienced God's presence, and to continue to grow my relationship with God, Godself.

There's nothing wrong with doubting, especially when the claims are really big.

But there's something that's important in Jesus' words – that people (like us) who can't touch him the same way that Thomas could, but could still believe, are blessed.

For many, belief is a starting point for their experience of God, rather than the other way around – and I celebrate people who are able to believe, without the experience first!

So... what's your experience of the Risen Christ?

What do *you* believe?