

2nd Sunday of Easter - 2019

What was it with Thomas? Why was he so unwilling to take the other disciples' word for it that Jesus had been raised from the dead?

We can only speculate, but even a bit of speculation can uncover some of the issues about faith and belief that are still current 2000 years later.

One of those issues is simply the fact of someone rising from the dead. There are many people in our present age who think highly of Jesus and even marvel at his commitment and willingness to die for what he believed in without taking that final step to belief.

The modern musical "Jesus Christ, Superstar" seems to take this position. Jesus comes through very favorably, but mostly because of his willingness to stay true to himself even if it meant suffering and dying for what he believed in. The resurrection does not figure prominently.

It seems unjust to fault Thomas too much for his skepticism when the other disciples were equally skeptical when the women of the group came back from the tomb announcing that Jesus was not there.

Believing in something unbelievable does not come easily for many of us. No one wants to be duped.

And then, there's the matter of the disciples, the ones charged with handing on the message. Perhaps Thomas returned to the upper room and did not notice that there had been any big change in the disciples themselves.

2nd Sunday of Easter - 2019

If they had experienced the risen Lord shouldn't that have had an effect on the disciples' behavior? When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after having conversed with the Lord God his face was so radiant that the Israelites could not look at it.

We don't hear anything of that sort having taken place with the disciples. It seems that Thomas was thinking that, if all that were true, there should have been some telltale sign that the Lord had truly risen and had been in the disciples' midst.

Thomas's statement, *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* really should not come off as all that foreign to us.

There are probably things in our world that we have reserved judgment about, or even already decided that they have no truth to them.

Jesus addresses that issue with Thomas, recognizing that there is reason enough to believe already, and that there will continue to be reason enough for all the future generations who have to make the decision to come to faith.

Thomas ultimately seems to have been won over by the fact that the Lord was present to him in an undeniable way—one that went beyond what he could have imagined on his own or which was open to doubt.

Those events still take place in the lives of people, and when they happen, nothing looks like it did before.

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And yet, for people for whom that has not been the case, it's worth considering how it is that they come to faith.

The first part of today's Gospel provides a clue. When Jesus proclaims "peace" to the disciples, he does so twice. The first time to allay their fears, but the second time is more like a mission: Now it's their turn to proclaim peace to all those they meet.

That's still the primary mission of Christianity, to be proclaimers of peace, to be committed to the work of forgiveness of sins and offering reconciliation in the world.

We often forget that part and make evangelization more about doctrine than practice. But practice is where the rubber meets the road. More people have been won over to Christ by the quality of the lives of Christians than any other way, and more have been turned off by a lack of that quality.

There's no getting around that.

In the Acts of the Apostles the most obvious feature of the Christian community was how they loved one another. That was evident to the outsiders looking in. That's what caught their attention.

Knowing what really impresses, knowing how best to bring down barriers of unbelief, we are encouraged today to be proclaimers of the Gospel by our willingness to serve peace and reconciliation, leaving the room open for God to take it from there.

There is no better way, because that is the way of Jesus, the risen Lord.