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Squamish United Church

April 11, 2010

Readings - Easter 1

**Psalm 150**

**John 20:19-31**

### **Meeting Jesus in our Doubts**

This story is all about Jesus.

We make it about Thomas but it's all about Jesus.

It's about Jesus breaking into a room with locked doors and breathing life into a group of people paralyzed by their fears.

The doors are locked and the disciples are hiding in fear for their lives.

Perhaps Thomas isn't there the first time because he doesn't want to be seen with them or because he has stopped believing or maybe the depression is too much to bear. He's not alone in his doubt and fear. All the disciples all hiding behind locked doors.

It is into their hiding place that Jesus breaks in to remind them to live.

His words are "Peace be with you," "forgive," "love"

He breathes Spirit life into them so that they will live.

And yet where do we find them only a week later?

Still behind closed doors.

Honestly it's not Thomas who should be getting the doubter label it's all the rest who should be given the living in fear label. Not to mention the fact that it seems every one of them has ignored the report of Mary who has already revealed to them that she has seen the Christ.

But we are missing the point by spending time labeling who is the worst doubter.

Remember, this story is all about Jesus.

If Jesus hadn't entered the room we wouldn't be reading the story of these men sitting in a quietly behind closed doors.

If Jesus hadn't come in and spoken directly to their fears we might not recognize that life, death and resurrection are all essential parts of the journey.

No matter what you believe about how or in what form the resurrection took place the fact is Jesus lived on. Something incredible happened in the lives of these disciples. For it is here in this moment that Thomas makes a clear confession of Christ's identity – "My Lord, My God"

Finally after a life of teaching, a tragic death and a resurrection the disciples begin to get it. And their lives begin to be transformed. They begin to see that they too are called to live into the story of walking with one another and with the Holy through all of life's experiences.

And it as the transformation begins we see Jesus step just a little closer to the heart of the matter as he offers Thomas the opportunity to replace his doubt proof – knowing that was a part of Thomas' need in his journey of faith.

I love this part of the story because Jesus doesn't condemn him for his doubts he acknowledges them and then goes on to meet Thomas exactly where he is at.

Imagine how it might have felt for Thomas when Jesus appeared.

I have here a reflection written by the Iona community that does just that. As you listen do you hear yourself in Thomas? Do you hear your faith questions?

“I expected him to scold me,  
not – as you might think – for doubting  
We had all doubted, at different times,  
And he was never angry with us.

Indeed he doubted himself, sometimes,  
Or if he didn't, he certainly understood how it felt,  
Because he would sing the Psalms of doubt with great fervor.

Doubt wasn't an enemy to him.  
He could stand us doubting.  
It was indifference he couldn't stand:  
Indifference and apathy.

I expected him to scold me  
Perhaps for making conditions. I did do that and I won't deny it.

“If only I see this and do that...then I'll believe.”

What a fool,  
Thinking I could make conditions with God,  
But he didn't take me to task.  
He saw that I was happy because I had seen  
And he said that they were also happy  
Who believed without making conditions,  
Without saying “if only” or “unless.”

I expected him to scold me  
Because I wasn't there when he came.  
The others were present, I was absent.  
It wasn't their fault or his fault.

It was mine.  
I had – for whatever reason –  
Decided it was all finished.

He came back to say it was all beginning.

I expected him to scold me.  
But he didn't.  
He gave me his hand  
And more than that he gave me his peace.”<sup>1</sup>

The presence of Jesus brought peace.

And it seems that in the end that was enough because it doesn't appear Thomas needed to touch the wounds. At least we are not told he did and I think we would know that.

Thomas knew it was Jesus because of his words and the presence of the one who willingly met him exactly where he was at.

Exactly where the Holy longs to meet you.

In your fears, your doubts, your courage, and your faith. In the realities of life.

And that is why I think it is significant that Jesus appeared showing his scars. Often when people tell me they have seen people after their death they are looking the best they ever have.

But not Jesus, he showed his scars.

I know as you know life is full of scars.

People often seek help to get rid of their wounds and flaws.

We wonder how can we live if we are wounded?

Perhaps the scars of Jesus are reminders to us and to the disciples that God understands pain, fear and condemnation.

Perhaps if the scars had not been there the whole thing would have been too magical. There must be a purpose in the scars, we would expect Jesus to return glowing with perfection. Why would we be able to see the scars?

Why would Jesus be remembered that way?

Perhaps it is because Jesus knows what it is to suffer, he knows what it is to fear and yet he lives on and commissions us to do the same. We are to continue his work making God known in a world that condemns love to death.

The one who stands there scarred is resurrected and breaths life into us, and welcomes us to align ourselves with God as we move forward. The scars remind us that God understands our journey, and does not call us to forget the suffering we or others have endured but to offer new life into and out of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Stages on the Way – Iona community Wild Goose Worship Group

Sometimes we believe when we meet Christ or become Christians or come to church all pain will disappear. Some of us have even been taught that. But even Jesus cried out in sorrow, prayed the psalms in desperation, longed for the world to change and he has the scars to prove it. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are all significant without one of them we would not follow him; the Christian faith would not exist.

God knows that some of us in this room have had a difficult life. We sit here together having experienced abuse, divorce, disease, addiction, tragic death and/or condemnation. Many of us have seen the dark side of life and almost all of us have scars from it. And so living in fear and unbelief with our doors locked up tight would be a lot easier than doing what Jesus asks.

And yet we are asked to live the Resurrection life. It's not that we are called to ignore the realities of the world and the difficulties it holds. We will doubt and question and wonder. But perhaps like Thomas our doubt will bring us to deeper faith. Jesus' scars signify that what we have been through is a part of us, and now we are called to live out of it, not ignore it, but not let it negatively define how we now live.

We might need to deal directly with our wounds in a variety of ways, but in doing so we will be brought to new life.

Easter is more than a bright celebration of spring and new life after the cold, grey winter. Resurrection lives out of our broken world into the scars and wounds of life where we allow God to Easter with us.

Resurrection doesn't deny the pain: it is not a pretty picture covering up nasty things. It is the reality of God with us; it is the difference God makes; it turns our lives upside down and brings us hope again.

The healing journey of Jesus calls us to live into peace. Easter is a celebration of life and yet like Thomas we doubt and wonder, like the disciples we fear the consequences of life.

But, as Buechner says "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith." Wonder keeps us awake and moving. Our heads are full of question and doubts and yet our heart comes to know and finds peace.

When our faith is strongest we believe with our hearts as well as our heads and we recognize the presence of Jesus with us calling us to the Resurrection life. Resurrection is at the heart of our faith; it is for every aspect of our lives. It is in those hard, wounded, scared places that we should be praying for a resurrection in our own lives.

And so the Easter question for our lives is where would you like to see Resurrection touch the scars in your life?

Where does this community need to acknowledge the scars and have the resurrection touch them?

We would know nothing of the Resurrection if the encounter with Jesus had not radically changed his followers lives. We are promised that he is with us and in that we are called to have the resurrection touch our lives too.

Amen