

Sermon : Easter 2. Year B. 4.11.99 STS

Text: John 20:19-31

Message: The apostle Thomas. Do not be faithless but believing.

Aim : To strengthen Faith in the Lord God.

+++++

I think a certain Mr. Jules Feiffer spoke for many of us when he said: “Christ died for our sins. Dare we make his martyrdom meaningless by not committing them?”

Our gospel reading for today tells of two of Jesus’s appearances after His Resurrection from the dead.

The fact that Jesus actually met with His disciples after He had been raised from death is of enormous significance.

How they responded to these appearances, and how we choose to respond to them is also of enormous significance.

Thomas is commonly known by the rather patronizing title of “doubting Thomas” for his part in this story. But if we leave it at that, we miss a great deal of what we might learn from Jesus’s interactions with His disciples.

When Jesus appeared to His Disciples, gathered together in a room that evening, it was in fact His fourth appearance on the day of His Resurrection.

The first had been in the morning when He appeared to Mary by the tomb. Mary and the other women had gone to tell the disciples, but they wouldn’t believe them, and in a very sexist manner, they dismissed it as the fantasizing of over-emotional women.

Two of the disciples were walking to a small town called Emmaus later that day, when Jesus appeared to them. Suddenly now believing, and energized by this amazing encounter, these two men promptly turned around and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem as fast as they could.

When they got to Jerusalem they learned that Jesus had also appeared to Peter. That made three separate appearances, but still not all of the disciples were willing to credit this miracle. After all, it seemed to be beyond belief.

Then, as they sat together in a locked room, talking about these three encounters, Jesus appeared again to all of them. To convince them that He was real, He showed them His wounds, and shared their food.

Now it just so happened that one disciple missed out on all four of these Easter day appearances, and that was Thomas.

Thomas wasn't really any different from anyone else. No one who had been told that day had immediately believed.

He had a very modern sensible pragmatic attitude. He was not the kind of person who would be impressed with statements such as: "The check is in the mail." He had a "Show me" attitude. He said "I'll believe it when I see it."

How Jesus dealt with Thomas the next time He appeared to His disciples one week later is interesting. He didn't put Thomas down for his lack of Faith. He did reproach him, yes, but in a gentle yet firm way, to help restore his Faith. Jesus showed him His wounds and gave him the opportunity to touch them if he wanted to.

There is a world of difference between the closed-mindedness of cynicism, and the open-mindedness of skepticism and the desire for further proof. Jesus gave Thomas the gift of further proof, just as He had already given it to the others.

In so doing, Jesus was saying that it was alright to have honest doubts. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. It can be a part of the journey to faith. It is an opportunity for learning. All the apostles and all great religious thinkers throughout the ages had times of doubt.

Many of us are really very like Thomas. We want further proof. We wonder - we question - we have doubts. Our faith is rarely constant, but tends to wax and wane, and often we want some extra reassurance.

Until that point Thomas had looked at life through a sense-based world view. Consistent with modern scientific procedure he insisted on empirical evidence. Evidence that was observable and tangible. He shared in the modern materialistic viewpoint that only what can be perceived and measured is real.

He was not so very different from most reasonably intelligent people today. A lot of us are only willing to believe what we can know through our senses. We feel a need for objective evidence.

Others of us base what we believe on our feelings, on our subjective experience. We feel a need for internal evidence. If we feel God's presence - if we sense God's guidance, our Faith increases.

The more we find internal evidence for God the more strongly we experience our faith. The problem though is when we don't sense God's presence our faith becomes weaker.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with evidence. It is perfectly fine to develop Faith through encountering objective evidence. But when evidence is not apparent does your faith disappear?

It is perfectly fine to develop Faith through internal evidence, through sensing God. But when the feelings are absent does your faith evaporate?

Neither objective evidence nor feelings are the ultimate basis for Faith. Indeed Faith is not dependent on anything external or internal. It is of a completely different dimension. Faith is contingent only upon God's perfect character.

Ultimately we have Faith by having Faith.

What Jesus said to Thomas was :

“Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

We are really blessed when we get to the place where our Faith is not influenced by changing circumstances.

We can make a decision to go about our day to day living, with our whole approach to life based in Faith.

Why not decide today to have that kind of faith?