



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Second Sunday of Easter – April 8, 2018, Stubborn Thomas

We often call the passage in today's Gospel "Doubting Thomas", but as I read through it again with fresh eyes, I realize that perhaps a better name for it is "Stubborn Thomas".

Haven't you ever been stubborn about something? Haven't you ever dug your heels in? And if you have, I'll bet it's probably because whatever it is you were being stubborn about was really important to you.

That's how it is for Thomas this morning. The presence of the Risen Lord is really important to him. And just seeing Jesus isn't good enough. Thomas wants to touch Jesus, feel his wounds; as if he wants to experience him more fully than the other disciples seem to be content with. And in that sense, Thomas is seeking unity, a unity based on a kind of physical proximity that's deeper than most people need to go, or want to go. Thomas doesn't want to just be in Jesus's midst, he wants to be a part of him by touching him and feeling his wounds.

And I get it.

As many of you know, I still have one living grandparent. I am very blessed. And when I came to Honolulu last year, I promised my grandmother, who will be 99 this December, that I would go home once a month to see her. And as many of you know, I honor that commitment and I fly back to Hawai'i Island every month. And, yes, I see her.

I see her. But that's not enough for me. I don't want to just see her, I want to connect with her. And the times that I love the most are when I give my mother and my auntie respite and permission to leave the house and to go and do something on their own, and my grandmother and I just spend time together – eating lunch, talking with each other, walking around her garden, telling stories about old times in Guam, recalling travels to Japan and the Philippines. I don't just go to see my grandmother. I go to connect with her.

I'm sure you understand.

I know many of you desire that kind of connection—with your significant others, with your friends, with your children, with your grandchildren, with your nieces, with your nephews; with anybody that you're close to.

And perhaps that desire to connect with others mirrors our innate Christian desire to connect with Jesus.

For me, personally, it's not enough to just hear the Gospel stories, to pray with icons, and to look at religious paintings. For me, I had to go to the Holy Land to walk in the places where Jesus walked, to stand in the places where Jesus taught, to pray in the places where Jesus prayed, to place my hands at the foot of the cross and in the tomb. Like Thomas, I needed to connect in a deeper way.

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What about you? What do you need to do to connect with Jesus? And as the community, can we give you permission to do it in whatever way you need to do it? And are you stubborn in your desire?

I hope so, because when we're stubborn about it, we also live into a desire to connect with other people around us; most especially one another—in the countenance on the faces of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

It's not enough for me to just come and preside at the Eucharist on Sundays. I want to be with you all more fully than that. I want to hear your stories, I want to share our joy as it mingles in and amongst us in the presence of the Holy Spirit—and I want to be stubborn about it.

The psalm this morning talks about unity and the desire for unity, saying that unity is like fine oil upon the head that runs down upon the beard. And I understand that, because to me, unity soothes and heals the soul in me that longs to connect.

So, I think the Gospel of Thomas is not so much a warning about doubt and lack of faith as it is about a call to be stubborn in our faith and our mandate to connect with Christ and the Christ we see in one another, to be in unity by recognizing the Christ on the countenance in the faces of our brothers and sisters.

May this Paschal candle of Easter shine its Christ-light on that call, and may our sacraments empower us and give us courage to live into that call.

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Be stubborn. Reach out. Connect. Connect with one another and connect with Jesus Christ.

Amen.