

"May We Live in Interesting Times"

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In an apocryphal story, a Chinese proverb is quoted as, "May you live in interesting times." Even though Chinese scholars are unfamiliar with the phrase, it's a great line which has been interpreted as both curse and blessing. Certainly, these past five years have been interesting times. At times, there did indeed feel like a curse had been cast on us, and yet... I look at all of us gathered here today and see nothing but blessings.

We now have the finest priest I have ever met as rector. There is a great staff in place. Wonderful clergy are coming to join you in ministry. There are some really important new ideas and programs under consideration and already under way. There is a great sense of vitality in this place. I smell the fragrance of blessing throughout this church. It's very exciting! And very interesting.

Thomas must have felt and thought these same things during his three years with Jesus. Indeed, those months and years together embraced both "the best of times and the worst of times." After being called to follow Jesus, I think one of the best times must have been his own experience of ministry - when Jesus "gave [the twelve] authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness." (*Matthew 10:1*) Remember how thrilled they were when they came back to Jesus telling of how they had actually done all sorts of marvelous things in God's name? It must have been the oft-repeated experiences of being with Jesus and seeing the lives of people restored, renewed, and re-created that gave Thomas the assurance to blithely say, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (*John 11:16*) when the sisters, Mary and Martha, pleaded for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus even though Jesus was under threat of death by stoning in Judea.

Thomas was there too that last night when Jesus began telling them of that the time for him to leave them was near. With all that he had seen, with all that had happened - the signs, as John calls them - Thomas, along with the others, was confused. Jesus die? How could such a thing happen? And where was Jesus going? How and when could they follow? Would they be able to follow? The end of their time together, the end of this amazing way of life - this couldn't be true, could it?

When the reality of Jesus' death came to pass, Thomas, like the others, went into hiding. We don't know how long he hid out, or where, but apparently he was separated from the others. He wasn't there on that first evening of resurrection time. We can only wonder what was he thinking and feeling during all those days of seclusion.

Probably we are all familiar with the stages of 5 Stages of Receiving Catastrophic News, (popularly misidentified the 5 Stages of Grief), recognized so many years ago by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross - Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. Thomas, with all those who knew and loved Jesus, surely experienced this range of emotions during that dreadful weekend before the news of the resurrection. So it doesn't really surprise me that Thomas's response to the rest of the disciples about seeing the risen Christ was disbelief. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (*John 20:25*) Sure sounds like Denial to me. And Anger. And maybe even some Bargaining and Depression. But definitely not Acceptance.

The loss of love, the loss of hope Jesus' death represented must have been just too great for this simple, devoted disciple. How could he be expected to believe and to hope again? How would he ever know the kind of love and joy and peace he had experienced with Jesus? No, it was just too much for one so caught up in grief. And so, Jesus came to him, to meet him where he was - in his denial, in his anger, in his sorrow.

Thomas didn't really need to touch the wounds of Jesus. His presence was enough for Thomas to know that restoration and renewal and re-creation would be the new Way, the new rule of life in God's world. And Thomas realized something else - something the other disciples had already discovered. That in this new Way, there is peace - peace of mind and peace of heart for each believer.

Maybe some of you watch that TV show, *Ghost Whisperer*, where each week, the main character, Melinda, encounters a ghost who wants her to do something in the here and now. Sometimes it's a demand for justice, sometimes it's a chance for reconciliation, and sometimes it's the need to bring comfort to those left behind. In every case, the ghostly presence cannot move on "toward the light" until their mission is accomplished by Melinda. And each week, the show concludes with the characters having found something that had been missing from their lives - peace.

Peace is the ultimate gift of God to those who see and hear and accept the Good News of the resurrection. Peace allows us to live together, to forgive each other, to mend each other's broken hearts, as Thomas' was. Peace restores our hopes and dreams; peace renews our spirit and gives us the courage to do God's will; peace will recreate this world, if we make it our way of life.

Thomas was blessed to know Jesus and to live in interesting times, even though during that long and lonely week, he must have felt cursed. The times we've shared have demonstrated that truth for us as well - that there is resurrection and there is peace. What's more, we are blessed - richly, abundantly, wastefully blessed - by God. Because of Christ's resurrection, we too will always be able to hope, ...to dream, ...to believe in a world where there is restoration, renewal and re-creation. What could be more interesting than that!

So, my prayer for all of us is this - may we live in interesting times, full of Good News, full of blessings, and full of love, joy and peace. Amen.