

Well, this week and next week are the last two weeks of our Easter season. And the sermons will form something of a pair. Today, we'll hear a resurrection story in which Jesus invites someone to touch him. Next week, we'll hear a resurrection story where Jesus is quite clear in saying, "Don't touch me." But today we'll think about Thomas or Doubting Thomas, as he's called.

The first question that came to my mind when thinking about this story is where was Thomas the night that Jesus appeared to his disciples? Had he popped out? Perhaps he'd gone to get some food for the disciples who were hungry. I could just imagine him coming back, knocking on the door, opening it and saying, "Hey, guys, I've got the food. Let's eat." And them all saying... Being too excited to eat because they've seen the risen Lord. Poof Thomas was left out. Whatever he had to do that night meant that the friends he left hungry, cowering, fearful behind locked doors, traumatized by the death of Jesus, well, he returned to find them telling amazing stories saying, "We've seen the Lord." Thomas is remembered for doubting, but he could just as easily be remembered for his unfortunate timing. Thomas is the disciple that missed the resurrection. And of course, he had to be persuaded after that, that the resurrection was real. "Unless I put my fingers in the marks on his hand and my hand in his side, I will not believe," he said.

We have a tendency to think that people who lived a long time ago were simple souls, unsophisticated, superstitious, that all that you'd need to do to persuade someone about the resurrection is to say, "Jesus is alive. He's risen from the dead," and people would all believe. Of course, that wasn't the case. People were as incredulous then as they are now. It was never easy to believe in the resurrection for Thomas or anybody else. Thomas and his contemporaries needed evidence to be persuaded, just as we do, that the resurrection is real. That's why Thomas said, "I need evidence. I need to touch. I need to see if I'm to believe." It's why St. Paul, in his writing, goes to great lengths to lay out that there are eyewitnesses to the

resurrection. He says in Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians that these people, and he names some, have seen, saw, the risen Jesus who appeared several times and then there were 500 eyewitnesses at one time. And he's writing these words, this is St. Paul, sort of 15 to 20 years after Jesus' death. So, the eyewitnesses that he named would still be around, they would be there to prove or disprove what St. Paul was saying.

When Paul was in front of the Roman governor, Festus, he said, the governor said, "Paul, your great learning is driving you insane." And Paul calmly replied, "I'm not insane. What I'm saying about the resurrected Messiah is true and reliable. None of it happened in a corner," Paul said. The resurrection faith is reasonable. Something that Paul the lawyer would understand as careful, rational, thoughtful, the resurrection didn't happen in secret. It was out in the open. There were hundreds of witnesses. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was no mere illusion. It was not a sign or a metaphor. It was an event that occurred in the material world of history, that changed the course of history. Hence, Thomas, when he finally does meet the risen Jesus, didn't need to put his finger in Jesus' hands or his hand in Jesus' side. By the time Jesus had invited him to do that, he needed no further convincing.

But I want to stay for a moment with the wondrous fact that Jesus, when he appeared to Thomas and the disciples, still had marks on his hand and in his side. After the crucifixion, after the resurrection even, Jesus still bore the scars of that crucifixion. This victorious body that had conquered sin and death, that had broken out of the grave with a radiant new life, was not without blemish. Jesus' body still had wounds. The resurrected body of Jesus was a scarred body. We live in a culture that's saturated by images of the so-called perfect body. Think Michelangelo's statue of David or the advertising that surrounds us. Yet we worship a savior whose body was scarred. The wounded body of Jesus challenges our contemporary notions of perfection. Too many of us too many times lose hope because we fail to live up to the profoundly

unhelpful and un-Christian notions of ideal or perfection.

I was talking with somebody recently who expressed their frustration that a weakness that they'd been battling for years, that they thought they'd conquered, reappears when they're tired or stressed. That's something I know I can relate to. So how do we respond to such feelings? Do we think, "Oh, I'm not really made new. I'm not really making any progress. I'm not really healed,"? That would be a natural response, but it's not very helpful. Remember, we have a wounded savior. His resurrected body is still scarred. It still bears the marks of crucifixion. It's a body which has been healed, restored, and is fit to enter glory, but it's not perfect in the Michelangelo sense of the word.

So, it is with us, there is no ideal or perfect version of us existing somewhere else. As God works in us, by his spirit to sanctify us and heal us, he's not making us perfect. He's not making us instantaneously into a perfect version of ourselves. He's restoring us through a process of restoration to who we truly are. Even after God has completed his work with us, the scars will remain. Our hope is that when we are restored and redeemed, we'll be fitting, we'll be fit for heaven. Our hope isn't that we'll be perfect. Too many of us suffer from the curse of perfectionism, which always condemns us to failure. If we aim at being flawless and perfect, we'll never get there. We'll always be frustrated by our failings and that's not what God wants for us. Let's be inspired instead by turning to our wounded savior who never escaped the marks of his suffering.

There's a magnificent verse in Romans Chapter Eight, I often like to quote it and I'm going to do it again now, "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his spirit that dwells in you." That is an incredible thought. That verse expresses the richness and the depth of this Easter season. Easter wasn't about God performing a conjuring trick with bones. It's not a metaphor or a sign that good will eventually overcome evil. It's not even something

simply which offers hope for our eternal future. It's a historical reality that transforms our understanding of life now and life to come. The spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is giving life to our mortal bodies. The resurrection of Jesus ushers in a new age. God's spirit has come and is at work in us and in the world.

Our hope isn't that one day God will make everything perfect. Our resurrection hope is that God is at work now by his spirit, restoring his creation to how it was meant to be. We are involved in that process. God, by his spirit, can dwell in us and can work in us, can transform us. And we, empowered by that same spirit, can be God's agents of change and transformation in the world.

Let me, as I draw to a close, offer a little secret with you, share a secret with you. I've changed the reading set for today and for next week. I don't like the fact that the set readings in our lectionary move on so quickly from the wondrous events of Easter. We very quickly leave the Easter day resurrection stories behind. I think that in this Easter season, we should really focus on the Easter message and the resurrection stories, which are so key and foundational to our faith. I think we need to take every opportunity, especially in this Easter season, to savor the depth and the wonder and the sheer mystery of what happened that first Easter day. We are an Easter people. In the midst of our sad and desperate world, we are a people of hope, a hope that is founded on the sure resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is to us proof that evil will not triumph. Death is not the last word. A great reversal has taken place. We live in the hope that God is at work in the world as he is at work in us.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, indeed. Hallelujah.