



*Some memories never let you go.*<sup>1</sup> Some events forever after impact who we are and how we understand our world. They impact how we think about life and our place in it. They impact how we move forward. Those memories become embedded in the very cells of our being.

For the Disciples, they must have been overwhelmed with their memories of the week leading up to the Crucifixion and then the resurrection. They must have been reeling from all that had happened. They must have been totally exhausted from the emotional highs of the entry into Jerusalem and the utter emotional despair of the crucifixion. Truly a roller coaster of emotions.

Imagine with me that first Easter evening. The Disciples- 10 that night because Judas was dead and Thomas was not there – are gathered in a room. They were afraid. They were certainly uncertain about their future. The questions were probably coming fast and furious about where would they go – what would they do – now that Jesus was dead. They had each given up their prior lives- and probably some of them their families- to follow Jesus. The one they believed was the Messiah – the Son of God – the one who would bring them eternal life – was gone. Their life had been turned upside down. What would they do now? Maybe they even thought everything they sacrificed for been for nothing. I imagine some of them felt foolish – they were probably imagining what their families would say – their faith was shaken to the very core of who they were and what they had believed. *How could they have been so wrong?*

And into their midst appears Jesus. Imagine the absolute disbelief that must have come over that group when Jesus appeared. Totally unexpected.

Have you ever had an experience where you thought life was over – and then something happens to make you think again? That's what those Disciples might have been feeling.

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<sup>1</sup> Renita Weems. *Listening for God*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 125

But Thomas wasn't there. Thomas, one of the twelve. Thomas, a twin. Thomas the doubter.

For whatever reason, Thomas was not with the Disciples on the night of that Easter Sunday. Thomas didn't experience the first time Jesus appeared in that room with a locked door. Thomas, the practical one, scoffs when he hears them say that the Lord has appeared – the Lord has been resurrected. Thomas insists that unless he, himself, sees the marks of the nails that he will not believe. “So, there! Hmmpf.”

Thomas had had enough. He might have been so depressed that he simply couldn't comprehend that Jesus had appeared. He wasn't willing to hope – *not again*.

And what happens? The next time this group has gathered, Jesus appears – even though the doors were shut.

Thomas is so important to God that Jesus appears again and offers Thomas the chance to make good on his threat. This is not Jesus shaming Thomas by having doubts. Rather, it is God, through Jesus, offering Thomas a road to faith.

Jesus says: “Here, Thomas – touch my hands and my side. Do not doubt but believe” (John 20: 27). This is maybe a bit of “be careful what you ask for.” Thomas, recognizing Jesus as risen lord exclaims: “My Lord and my God!”

Faith doesn't require blind obedience. Faith – true faith- is strong enough to handle our doubts. Faith “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). But getting to that assurance and that conviction can include doubts.

At the same time, there is a point beyond which “we have to take it on faith” – not all of our questions, not all of our doubts, are going to be answered in black-and-white ways.

Faith is stronger for having questions. For being willing to be vulnerable and say, “I just don't understand, but I believe” It's ok not to have all the answers. Or, in the words of the father with the son who experiences convulsions and comes to Jesus for healing: “I believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:17-29).

Tradition has it that Thomas begins to preach the resurrected Lord in Syria and ultimately went to India. While in India he is credited with reaching many who came to believe in Jesus the Christ. Thomas' own experiences become the basis for his message to others. Thomas' own experiences give his message of the Risen Christ an authenticity that others perceive. Thomas' own unbelief is transformed into belief and a mission. Thomas's world was so changed in that instant when Thomas was offered the chance to put his hands in Jesus' wounds that it became the driving force for the rest of his life. *Some memories never let you go.*

Reality confronted Thomas in that room even though the doors were shut. Christ sought him out – Thomas had a role to play in spreading the Gospel – the good news- that Jesus,

the Christ, though crucified and buried- was alive. God is with us even in the depths of our despair.

David Lose argues that Thomas has gotten a bad rap as “the doubter.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lose says that Thomas is instead a pragmatist- the one who insists that we question. It is Thomas who earlier in John’s gospel replies that “Lord, we don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (John 14:1-7). Maybe Thomas is Jesus’ straight man. Without Thomas asking questions like this, we wouldn’t have Jesus’ reply: “I am the way, and the truth and the life.” Pragmatist, realist, glass half-empty. Whatever label you want to put on Thomas, he helps us see that it is ok – and even necessary- to question, to doubt. How can we respond to someone’s questions about faith if we haven’t asked our own questions? Thomas shows us that when we question, we may end up with a deeper faith. We may have an experience of the divine that forever after changes our life.

Thomas’s challenge that he will not believe unless he sees the wounds for himself ends up setting him on a path that he most likely never envisaged.

Renita Weems cautions us that “*blessings bless and blessings cost.*”<sup>3</sup> Thomas had many blessings. He was called to be one of the twelve. He had a personal - real life and real time- relationship with Jesus that none of us can experience in exactly the same way given that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But Thomas is important to us today even though we can’t have exactly the same experiences he did.

Thomas’s blessings – knowing Jesus as a living person – and being offered the opportunity to touch the wounds also ends up costing Thomas his life. He was martyred for the faith. *Blessings bless and blessings cost.* In living out the blessing of knowing the resurrected Lord, Thomas becomes an itinerant preacher. Thomas takes the Gospel to Syria and later to India. Not exactly a life of ease and leisure. *Blessings cost.*

Thomas the pragmatist wanted to be sure before he stepped out on a limb. But once he had that assurance, he gave his mission everything he had. Thomas wasn’t afraid to ask questions of Jesus. But once Thomas became convinced of who Jesus was, Thomas stepped to the plate and shouldered his share of the mission to spread the word of Jesus Christ to those with whom he came into contact - even if doing so meant it cost Thomas something – indeed, his very life.

Fortunately, none of us are likely to be called to give our lives in support of the Gospel. And maybe that’s one of the reasons why it’s hard for us to always see the relevance of living our lives in ways that evidence the good news when doing so means it costs. It costs to tithe. It costs to spend our time on Sunday morning coming to church. It costs to determine what our gifts are and how our gifts might be used in the service of our Lord. And, then, having the courage to use our gifts. *Blessings cost.*

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<sup>2</sup> David L. Lose “Realities Old and New”. *Journal for Preachers*. Easter 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Weems, 132.

*But blessings also bless.* By tithing we support the work of this parish and our wider church throughout our communities and the world. By worshipping together on Sunday morning, we create a community – one that cares whether we are here. One that cares when we have needs. One that stands with us in times of trial and loss. By knowing what our gifts are and how we might use them, we strengthen our own lives by developing more fully who we are and how we give to our families, friends and communities. By living into all of our God-given talents, we witness to Christ whether we speak the words or not.

Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon each of the disciples and then instructs them: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20: 22-23). *Blessings cost.*

Yes, we will not always get along. We will not always like each other. We may wish that someone behaved in ways we deemed appropriate. We may wish we got the attention that we see someone else getting. Jealousy. Envy. Pride. At least 3 of the seven deadly sins.

As long as we are giving room in our heads and hearts to these feelings, we are retaining the sins, real or perceived. We are the ones ignoring what Christ has ordered us to do. We are not loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Jesus asks us to forgive the sins of others. Jesus knows that when we do so, we are the real benefactor of that forgiveness. Our head is cleared of jealousy, envy, pride, lust, greed, sloth or gluttony. And when that space in our head is cleared out, we have more room – and more energy- and more ability- to love our neighbor as God has loved us. *Blessings bless and blessings cost.*

Dr. Lose reminds us that Jesus offers us grace and mercy when he says “Peace be with you.” This grace and mercy does not detract from Thomas’ or our need to be realistic or pragmatic. Rather, Jesus’ offer of grace and mercy transforms our reality. God, through Jesus, and through the resurrection, is present in our world in ways that we can only begin to imagine. Remember, then, the gracious gift to us from God. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. *Glory, hallelujah! Amen.*