



The Epistle

April, 2016

Father Bob's message

I was looking through some of my notes that I had collected as part of my sermon preparation for the last two Sundays. As some of you know, I am particularly fond of Thomas and feel that his being labeled as "doubting Thomas" both unfair and inaccurate.

First because if you read the gospels, it is clear that none of the disciples had really expected that Jesus would rise from the dead. Furthermore, none of them were seemingly willing to proclaim their belief in the resurrection of Jesus based solely on the word of someone else. They did not believe the women, did they? I have suggested and will suggest here that Thomas was more typical of the disciples rather than being a unique case.

Now one thing that I did not mention in my sermon on the 2nd Sunday of Easter and which is not addressed in John's gospel is why Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection. Now given that the gospel of John does not mention a reason for his absences, what I say is purely conjecture and speculation. Thomas' absence is noted in the narrative this way, "But Thomas...was not with them when

Jesus came." Now it seems to me that we often think of Thomas' absence as being a bit of bad luck, that Thomas was out doing an errand or something when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. But in my notes, I found that the tense of the Greek verb in this passage suggests an on-going action, not a one-time event. Now could this mean that Thomas had separated himself from the other disciples intentionally? Could it have been that Thomas' faith had been so shattered by the events of Good Friday that in his confusion, disbelief and fear he no longer saw himself as a part of the Christian community? Of course if this were so why then did Thomas return to the others?

Again no reason is given in the narrative for his return.

But here again I would speculate and suggest that having been a part of a community, he was still drawn to it in spite of his fears and turmoil.

Now the other disciples tell Thomas, "We have seen the Lord". Here again as with the verse mentioned above, the verb tense suggests an on-going action. The verse could then be translated, "the other disciples were telling Thomas..." The week between Jesus' first appearance and his second may well have been a week of intense dialogue aimed at reconciling Thomas to the community. Could this explain why Thomas remained with the others and was there when Jesus appeared the second time?

As I read my notes, I noted that just maybe the community of the disciples was far more important than I have given credit to in the past approach to this narrative. I also noted in my notes that this would be a good topic for a sermon. Is it possible that Thomas' presence during the second appearance of Jesus may have been the result of the community taking on the role of reconciling themselves with Thomas and Thomas with them? At the same time, I think that it is clear that while Thomas was

being reconciled with the other disciples, he is there with them with all his doubts and questions intact.

Could this then suggest that the disciples' manner of reconciliation was not, "Believe like us and you can be a part of us?"

Or was it more along the line, "This is what we believe and you are welcomed here however you believe."

I wonder if the disciples' task, our task, is not one of convincing others to believe, nor is it to coerce a confession of faith that is in line with our own, but to embrace our own faith while making community with others. In this case the role of the other disciples is not to convince Thomas but to maintain the integrity of their own experience and belief while inviting him to be part of them.

Is our role to convert a person or to make that person welcome in our midst?

Is our faithful call as a community of faith to make others believe as we believe, or to walk with them in their journey as an expression of what we believe.

Remember that they will know that we are Christians by our love. We are not to judge, that is up to God; we are to love. We are to feed Christ's sheep and tend his sheep.

When you and I express ourselves as a community of faith disposed to seeking to be reconciled as well as reconciling, then we create opportunities for others, including those whose ability to believe has been shattered, to meet Christ anew. Is this not what it means to be a witness for Christ? It worked in Thomas' case, I would suggest. Indeed, it led to Thomas making the most profound confession of who Jesus is in the whole of the New Testament: "My Lord and My God".

Something to think about.

Do not forget that our Bishop will be with us for Eucharist on 24 April. Please plan to attend and show him that we are a reconciled and a reconciling community.

Fr Bob

Senior Warden Update

We hope that during April and May we will be able to get the some of our projects concerning our water problems that surfaced during the October rains completed. Due to the need to define all of the problems and come up with cost effective solutions we have had to go back to the drawing board to rethink the best approaches. Much progress has been accomplished but we still have a way to go to ensure that all of the known problems are corrected. The projects will be completed as the best means of correction are determined. This may take a little more time than anticipated but we will work through it.

Bishop Waldo will be here on Sunday April 24th. The food and help sign up list is on the bulletin board. Please coordinate with Beverley and MJ and provide all the assistance you possibly can. We will have a forum during the meal with the Bishop and if you have questions of him please ask. He enjoys coming to St. Stephen's not only for the great food but also just to be able to visit with us and give us a better idea of what is going on in the Diocese. Please plan on attending.

DID YOU SIGN UP FOR
HOSPITALITY SOON?



APRIL

4/3	OPEN
4/10	OPEN
4/17	OPEN
4/24	BISHOP VISIT

MAY

5/1	David & Amanda Ford
5/8	Sara Berk & Greg Koenig
5/15	OPEN
5/29	OPEN



*Please wish the following people
Happy Birthday*

APRIL

4/2	Doug Bryant
4/8	Ann Ellison
4/9	Gavin Reyes
4/13	Beverley Anderson
4/17	Andrew Saless
4/20	Jarrett Palmer
4/20	Charlotte Floyd
4/21	Ava Langdale
4/23	Tonya Rowe
4/29	Jennifer Autry
4/29	Ken Baldwin

MAY

5/1	Michael Rowe
5/2	Robert Arndt III
5/3	Michael Autry
5/7	Donna Guess
5/15	Ryan Floyd
5/15	Greg Koenig
5/17	Jeremy Maglio
5/22	(Michael) Reese Addison
5/23	Catherine Beale
5/28	Derek (&David) Montrose
5/29	Rebecca Ford