

Wesley United Methodist Church

April 8, 2018

“Touch and Feel, Taste and See.”

John 20:19-31

There is an old story about the four-year-old son of an undertaker who was rather perplexed after he heard the story of the resurrection in Sunday School on Easter. “Do you mean that Jesus really rose from the dead?” the boy asked. “Yes, Jesus really rose from the dead,” The Sunday School teacher said. Shaking his head in wonder the boy said, “Well, I know my daddy didn’t take care of him then, cause his people never get up again.”

Maybe the little boy was related to Thomas. He needed more proof. He knew what he believed and what the others were telling him was contrary to all that he’d ever seen or believed could ever happen. Once you were dead, there was no getting up. That was absurd. I guess Thomas forgot about Lazarus. Whatever the case, Thomas needed to Touch and Feel before he could believe. He needed to see it with his own eyes.

Let’s look at the passage from John 20:19-31 which describes that incident.

Read John 20:19-31...

During his long career as pastor of New York’s Riverside Church, the late Harry Emerson Fosdick spent many hours counseling students from nearby Columbia University. One evening a young man burst into his study and announced, “I have decided that I cannot and do not believe in God!”

“All right,” Dr. Fosdick replied, “But describe for me the God you don’t believe in.” The student proceeded to sketch his idea of God. When he finished, Dr. Fosdick said, “Well, we’re in the same boat. I don’t believe in THAT God either.”

I wonder if that might not have been the motivation behind Thomas’ doubt. The God he believed in and the God made present to the world in the flesh of Jesus weren’t the same. Thomas only thought he knew who God was and who Jesus was. Maybe it was that phrase at the last supper which confused him, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Whatever the case, Jesus didn’t condemn Thomas for his doubt. And he used that moment of doubt as a teaching moment about faith. Doubt isn’t bad or wrong or a sin. Doubt is actually quite useful in the faith. Otherwise we might fall for the gospel of every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Doubt can act as a filter.

Robert Strand writes: “Faith lives in the same apartment building as Doubt. When Faith was out of town visiting her uncle in the hospital, Doubt fed the cat and watered the Asparagus fern. Faith is comfortable with Doubt because she grew up with him. Their mothers are cousins. Faith is not dogmatic about her beliefs like some of her relatives. Her friends fear that Faith is a bit stupid. They whisper that she is naïve and she depends on Doubt to protect her from the meanness of life. In fact, it is the other way around. It is Faith who protects Doubt from Cynicism.”

Somebody wrote, “I spent twenty years trying to come to terms with my doubt. Then one day it dawned on me that I had better come to terms with my faith. Now I’ve passed from the agony of questions I can’t answer into the agony of answers I can’t escape. And it’s a great relief.”

I think that’s what Thomas felt. Jesus took his doubt seriously. He didn’t dismiss it. Instead Jesus offered the proof Thomas needed.

I also think Thomas wanted desperately to believe. But he was realist. He saw the spear pierce Jesus’ side. He saw the tomb sealed. And it had been three days. He wanted desperately to believe but there were so many things, so many unanswered questions getting in the way. Jesus knew all this. He understood completely. We don’t all come to God or come to believe the same way. So Jesus meets us where we are.

For Thomas, Jesus was standing right there, alive. Death had been conquered. Touching Jesus’ scars gave Thomas hope. Hope about the meaning of his life. Hope that life really does matter. Hope that Jesus’ words and teachings were true. And hope that the Easter story is true.

Thomas was able to Touch and Feel, all you and I can do is Taste and See, like Psalm 34:8 says: “O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”

Today we come to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion. Next to the resurrection itself, this is as close as we get to being Thomas. This is as close as we get to the scars and the wounds. And yet Christ invites us to extend our hands, just as he did Thomas, not to touch his side or the wounds in his hands, but to reach out and receive the bread and wine. The Sacrament that symbolizes and embodies his sacrifice on the cross for us.

Just as Jesus gave Thomas hope and a future and sealed his faith with that touch, this simple bread and wine that we receive this morning gives us hope, gives us a future and seals our faith. All we’re asked to do is believe, stretch out our hands and receive.

So, I give you this simple invitation. Come to the table this morning. Bring your doubts and replace them with faith. Believe, stretch out your hands and receive.