

SEE AND TOUCH PROOF

John 20: 19 – 31 April 11, 2010

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Mary Magdalene was bold in her coming to the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning. And because she stayed at the tomb, she became the first witness to the resurrection.

In our text for today, Jesus appears to disciples – all of whom were too fearful to venture out before dawn on Easter Sunday, or even venture out during the day. We find them gathered behind locked doors, filled with fear. And we don't need to be judgmental toward them. We can ask, who are they afraid of? Certainly the Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders. The disciples may have been afraid because of their own actions. Remember these disciples behind these locked doors are the inner circle of the followers of Jesus. They are the very one's who shared that last supper with Jesus in the upper room. They had assured Jesus – "We are with you if all others flee." Yet, when it got dark and the soldiers came for Jesus – all the disciples fled into the darkness. We label Judas as betrayer. But he was not the only betrayer. All had fled in fear. It is understandable. The Roman soldiers came with swords and clubs. Violence was the method used to keep power in Judea. Now, the disciples might be ashamed of their actions. What if Mary was telling the truth? What is Jesus, the one they loved was coming to say, "Where were you people? What happened to your promise to stick with me?"

The risen Christ appears among these disheartened, fearful disciples. His first word to them is "Peace." Easter is not only about the defeat of sin and death, not only about new life – Easter is about forgiveness. Jesus pronounces peace to his disciples before any of them ask for it. Normally, for us, if we forgive at all, it is a secondary word after the offender has asked for forgiveness. No disciple said, "I'm sorry." No disciple asked for forgiveness. Catholic moral theology specifies that, in the dynamic of penitence in the church, for there to be forgiveness, there must be an "act of contrition." There is none of that here – only Jesus speaking the word, Peace – that is, "I forgive you." I don't really believe that forgiveness is something that can be mandated as something to be done once and for all time. We Christians know how long a job forgiveness can be. Forgiveness is the restoration of a relation with the victim on an offense. I believe forgiveness also restores us to God.

In our scientific age, we are trained to verify by trusting some sense experience. Sight and touch make a very strong impression and give us evidence to be trusted. It is this very sort

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of proof that Jesus offers Thomas. “Put your hand here and see my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Touch and see. Do not accept something just because people repeat it to you. Hearing and seeing are crucial to this passage. Peter and John saw the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene heard her name called. Now Jesus says, “Peace be among you.” to the disciples gathered in that locked room. Jesus teaches them the words of forgiveness. But Thomas had not seen, touched, or heard Jesus as the others had. Thomas catches the brunt of the text for today. This story of Thomas is so dramatic that we tend to narrow the scope of thought. Thus, Thomas gets the name “doubting.” It is not a title of affirmation. We ask, “Why did he not catch on right away? Was he agnostic or a skeptic? Truth is – he simply was absent – he did not hear and see and touch.

I believe the text today is not about Good Friday or Easter Day. It marks a new beginning in our life of faith and the church. Up until this story, faith came in the face of Jesus’ physical presence. Faith here is not based solely on sight. The proof comes through hearing. Thomas, who is not the last doubter, is the one to whom it is announced that hearing would do it all. Jesus SPOKE an invitation to touch and see. We are not told whether Thomas did touch. What matters is he does hear the words of Jesus and says “My Lord and my God.” This occasion blesses still in Asia, Africa Australia, the Americas - “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Thomas wanted what anyone else would want. He wanted proof. We need not come down so hard on Thomas. His is much like us.

I think what the writer of John was getting at is key concepts within the community of faith. Love and Trust. Love and trust within the faithful community are the significant expression of the work of Christ in their midst. So the words of Thomas to the disciples are stinging words – especially in the Greek – “There is no way I will believe unless I see it for myself.” The original intent on the words to the disciples is that Thomas will not believe their eyes, he will not believe their fingers. There is no love and trust toward the disciples. Thomas must see for himself. Proof for myself

Lack of trust and love is a most damaging occurrence in the church to this day. Thomas skepticism threatens the church today. The radical suspicion of our companions in faith tears at the very fabric of the church today. We can list our experiences of this distrust. Someone will not accept the trust- worthiness of the deacons who count the offering. Some believer wonders if people who do not accept all the lines of his creed are really Christians. The Roman church is struggling with facing the truth of the actions of priests. It is rapidly losing the trust and love of those who want to give that to the church they so love and trust. Love and trust are still marks of the Christian community.

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I am not talking about Christians being gullible or naïve. We know what it is to “test the spirits.” To test a speaker we recall the philosophers word, “ethos.” It means character. We are not likely to put much stock in the words of a hypocrite or known liar.

We know Aristotle’s word “pathos’. It means sympathy or empathy. We know what it is to identify with those who suffer, those who have felt abandoned, those distracted. And we know that doing theology – how we live out our lives must match up with our words of theology.

We have and are going through a critical time in the life of Pilgrim. We have not and will not all think alike. We want different things. I believe what has held us together is our insistence that this community of faith will live in trust and love with each other. We live out of an attitude of respect and acceptance that comes from our understanding of God’s love and acceptance of us. When we live out that trust and love, we are the church at its best.

In A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY, Owen believes in God and God’s work in his life. He believes this without clear cut evidence of proof. His life long friend, John, does not have the same solid conviction. What John has is a confidence in his friend that carries him through his own skepticism and into a new life.

Easter – signs of God’s presence among us. Can we see it? I pray we will see the signs of new life as we walk in this fellowship of faith.