

A-Easter 2, 2008  
St. Luke's, Renton, WA  
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John 20.19-31

On that first day of the week, no longer bound by space or time, Jesus walks through walls and locked doors appearing to his followers. And here, we still gather on the first day of the week to be people of the resurrection, followers of the Christ. And if we're faithful, we keep an eye open for how Jesus will traipse across the boundaries of our lives, blessing us with peace, bearing the possibility of reconciliation.

There is a church I "discovered" in Parish that I attended with some frequency over a few years called St. Gervais. I later learned I hadn't discovered it at all and that it is one of the spiritual and liturgical "hot-spots" of the world. There is a large monastic community of women and men attached to the church who live out there vocations in the city and share a rule of life together that includes the most spectacular singing imaginable. What I love most about attending St. Gervais, though, is the peace. There are not pews at St. Gervais, but instead small stools. And at the peace this community of sisters and brothers sweep through the congregation like a wave with beatific faces aglow in the spirit, they grasp your hands and utter the peace of Christ. In this split-second exchange that lasts for eternity, you can feel the peace of Christ touch and flood your soul.

On the Second Sunday of Easter we always tell the story of Thomas--Thomas who wanted to see, too. He wanted to touch and see the Risen One as the other disciples had. He's become the patron saint of doubters and skeptics--a camp most of us live or have lived among, if the truth be told. However, the story that gets told, that this is "Doubting Thomas", I think, misses the point. I think Thomas simply sought an experience of the Risen Christ--a divine encounter, just as you and I.

The dilemma in John's gospel is that the people to whom he writes are living at the end of the first century, generations after the life of Jesus. Eye witnesses of the life of Jesus have all died without leaving their cam-corders or cell phones, alas. How in the world do you tell the story of Jesus so that the *story itself* will communicate an experience of Jesus? How to tell the story so that people will *believe* who neither remember Jesus nor have seen his appearance? John wants his audience to believe so that they may have life.

I find this a little troubling to read with our modern notion of belief in my head. We have lived through a time in the faith of the church when belief has meant mental assent. When we are asked to believe something for which there is scant evidence, our choices are to screw up our courage and muscle our minds into believing, or to opt for disbelief. Most of us, probably say we believe and remain highly skeptical.

If I ask you to believe that this page is white, you have no problem assenting to that. If I ask you to believe that I am a perfect human being, you would have to suspend all rational capabilities or, more likely, you would run for the door. Many, in our time, have been heading for the doors out of churches or passing up churches in the first place, because they assume they will be asked to believe things they do not believe. Or as Jesus scholar, Marcus Borg is fond of saying, belief has come to mean believing that "iffy" things are factually true.

In other times people have understood belief differently. For example, religious belief means trust. My experience of God lets me know that I can trust God. I may not like what's going on. I may have a hard time assenting to God in the moment, but there is a relationship of trust that under-girds all things. When I say I believe in God, one of the things I mean is that I trust God. At my best, I trust God more than I trust myself. To believe means to trust.

There is an element of belief that is about being faithful. Faithfulness, fidelity, is a major part of Israel's story through the Old Testament, (or I should say infidelity is a major part of Israel's story). God is always calling Israel to stop whoring after other gods and return and be faithful. The prophets were ever challenging the people to faithfulness. When we are faithful to God, we find that God is faithful to us. Like in any relationship, if one partner is not faithful to the other, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe and trust in that other. Fidelity is a form of belief that is known by our faithful participation in relationship with God. And who among us who has been faithful to God had, at the end of the day, not found God faithful in return?

Trust ... fidelity ... and my favorite form or definition of belief derives from the Latin word for belief: *credo*. The Nicene Creed that we say is called the Creed because of its first word: *Credo*, meaning, I believe. But etymologically the word *credo* comes from a conjunction of words that have nothing to do with mental assent. *Credo* literally means "to put heart". I put my heart, I give my heart." And that gets translated as "I believe". To believe is to give our heart. Just take a moment and feel what a difference that makes to say the creed that way, I give my heart to God, I give my heart to Jesus, I give my heart to the Holy Spirit. Belief is an affirmation of giving our hearts, pledging our hearts, betrothing our hearts to God.

And what we notice is that all of these aspects of belief bring us into relationship with the other: trust involves a relationship, fidelity involves a relationship, to give one's heart involves a relationship ... to believe in God is to enter into a relationship, an interaction with God, a relationship of trust, fidelity, love ... mind, body, and soul. We are not on our own in this.

My own read of today's story about Thomas is that Thomas wanted the "full meal deal" when it came to the Risen One. "I want to put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side." "I want him to walk through the walls of my life and the closed door of my heart." I want this relationship to be really real.

And that is what Jesus comes through the locked doors of our lives offering on that first day of the week, and on this first day of the week: a relationship of peace, a relationship of reconciliation, a mind-boggling relationship of trust, fidelity, and love.

How do we tell the story so that other people will believe and have life?

The Community at St. Gervais of Paris sure knew how—with just one look their faces and their utterance of *la pax de crist* (the peace of Christ), I would be overcome with the living presence of the Risen Christ.

When we release one another from the sins and hurts and offenses and misunderstandings of our lives rather than harbor grudges, there is a freedom that feels like the Risen One is in our midst.

Jesus comes through the solid walls and locked doors, the doors that shut in our fears, shut out our differences, and distance us from our heart's desire. Jesus comes to us with a relationship of peace and the prospect of a new relationship with each other, one of trust, fidelity, the putting



forward of our hearts. And when we choose to venture there with God and with one another, we find ourselves supported and suspended in a place we would have never in a million years believed. Alleluia.