

CONVINCING EVIDENCE

TESTIFY TO LOVE ~ Episode One ~ John 20: 19-31 [attached]

The lawyer in our little drama this morning demands facts – proof – he wants evidence of the resurrection. In truth, so does Thomas – at least at the beginning. In the reading from John's gospel he not only wants visual evidence – he expects a physical experience – to see the mark of the nails and to touch them – to put his hand in the wound of Jesus' side. The lawyer in the story and the disciple in the scripture want convincing evidence – perhaps you and I are like them – perhaps we are hungry for a little evidence of the resurrection, or at least a little more than we usually have.

It has been said that "without faith, no evidence is sufficient; with faith, no evidence is necessary."

I think that Thomas demonstrates this principle. Although he is much maligned – dubbed "Doubting Thomas" – this is an unfair characterization. Thomas doesn't ask for any more evidence of resurrection than the other friends of Jesus had already been given. He was not with the others on that Easter morning when Jesus appeared to them. We don't know why he wasn't there; we just know that Easter did not happen to him when it happened to the others. They saw and heard Jesus before Thomas did; and try as they might to convince him that Jesus had been raised from the dead, Thomas wasn't buying it. He wanted to see, hear and touch Jesus for himself – he wasn't asking for anything the others hadn't already experienced, but that simple request has caused many to scold him as a doubter.

I don't know about you but can identify with Thomas and his critical mind – with his struggles to believe. Frederick Buechner said that "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith – they keep it awake and moving." Certainly I am enthusiastic about the liveliness of faith. Wrestling, questioning and even a little doubting are healthy for us as believers in the way that walking and doing puzzles are healthy activities for our minds and bodies – keeping us awake and moving.

So Thomas wants what the other disciples had – a little proof – to see – to touch – and a week later – today – he gets his wish. Jesus comes and stands among them offering peace and proof. Thomas is in no way criticized for his demand of evidence. Jesus presents himself – submits himself as evidence – encouraging Thomas to believe. Yet abruptly it seems that Thomas needs no such substantiation – he doesn't touch the wounds as he demanded but cries out "*My Lord and my God!*" He suddenly believes and no evidence is necessary.

That is all very well and good for Thomas of course but what about you and me? Like the lawyer in the drama we wouldn't mind a little evidence – even just a peek at the risen Jesus would satisfy. The writer of John's gospel helps us out a bit here. He tells us that Jesus says something to Thomas that is meant for the rest of us – for those of us who stand where Thomas stood before Jesus appeared to him – *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*. Then the author speaks to his audience directly – speaks to us

directly – saying that he has written many of the signs Jesus demonstrated in his lifetime. He is confident that he has given us enough information – enough evidence if you will – for faith to be born. In essence he says, “Now listen, friends: I have left out a ton. Jesus said and did lots of other really amazing things that I just have not gotten around to even mentioning. But what I have given you is enough. Read it and believe!”

Jesus is not likely to appear among us bodily and tangibly. If you and I are going to believe, we will have to do so without seeing.

How will we do that? Is it possible? If we are not going to see Jesus with our own eyes and hear Jesus with our own ears, is there any evidence at all on which we can base our faith? What are the signs of the resurrection?

I know that some of you may raise your eyebrows at this but I think that the answer is, in large part, the church. The life of the church is to be a witness to the resurrection – evidence to the world that Jesus Christ is alive in the here and now. The church is meant to be God’s sign to the world that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The early church leapt into existence when those first disciples realized they had an unbroken and unbreakable connection to Jesus. Enlivened and emboldened by the connection, they lived in their world with such passion and compassion – such love and grace – such generosity and power, that the only plausible explanation for their life together was the presence and the power of the risen Christ.

Think of the passage from the book of Acts that Jim read for us today:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Such joy, celebration, and exuberance – such compassion, generosity and love – had only one believable explanation: Jesus was with them. Because Jesus was with them, they gave themselves on behalf of the broken, bruised, and battered; they shared their lives with the least and the last. They had deep love for one another, tender compassion for their neighbours, and passionate devotion to God. There were signs of the resurrection all around – a vivid demonstration of the living Christ.

Certainly not perfect – as our churches today are not perfect. Just as human and flawed as our own communities of faith yet they are described as a bold and shining witness to the resurrection. If that oh-so-human and imperfect bunch of long ago could rise with Jesus above its own pettiness to be an Easter church, maybe we too – in spite of ourselves – can manage to be transparent to the presence of the living Christ. As we gather together – break the bread – tell our stories – sing our songs – pray our prayers – bear witness to the good news – care for those in need – work for peace – struggle for justice – as we live this resurrected life, we discover anew that Jesus is truly alive among us. **Amen.**

This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. The Rev. L. T. Kavanagh, 2009