

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

I've always had a soft spot for the disciple Thomas. We know almost nothing about him other than the extract from this morning's reading where we hear him question the risen Christ. In many parts of the Christian church Thomas has come in for heavy flak for daring to doubt the risen Christ. But for those of us who are skeptical and for those of us who like to see some real evidence before jumping to conclusions, Thomas is something of a hero. For in Thomas we see that faith deepens when questions and doubts are articulated. Without the questions and doubts of Thomas we would have no real way of knowing that the risen Christ was not some ghostly apparition. But precisely because of Thomas, we are led to believe that the one who is risen is also the one who was crucified. Precisely by wondering out loud whether it could really be Jesus, Thomas helps us all to see that resurrection was not some conjuring trick or collective hallucination.

I think it is deeply significant that this church takes its name from Thomas. Intentionally founded to serve in a college community it is surely no accident that our church has a patron who is the patron saint of questioners and skeptics. Without people to ask hard questions, and often questions that no one wants asked, very few good things would ever happen. Just imagine a world where no one had asked whether the world was really flat. Or a world where no one wondered why apples fall from the sky. Or a world where no one questioned segregation. Or a world where no one asked why women are paid less for doing the same work. Time and time again our world has needed people to ask difficult questions. Without

those difficult questioners just imagine how awfully impoverished and utterly different everything would be.

On this second Sunday of Easter each of us needs to remember that questions and doubts lead us into deeper places. Of course this is not an easy knowledge. And by shutting down questions and ignoring doubts we can all choose to keep our faith safe and superficial, unaffected by anything important. But this would ignore the response of the risen Christ to Thomas. Christ does not shut Thomas down or evade his questions. Rather, Christ encourages Thomas in giving him the information that he needs. Significantly we don't exactly know what happens. But we know what didn't happen. Christ did not demean Thomas or his questions. In fact, he met him where he was. He understood his need to know more, and he helped Thomas discover the truth for himself.

This way of teaching contrasts with authoritarian top-down models of truth telling so beloved by wider society. Thanks to Thomas we know that the truth that is the resurrection life is neither some kind of disembodied truth nor is it baseless. Too many institutions, corporations and religious groups expect us to trust them without telling us why. And few of us have not experienced the radical dishonesty of truth claims that are little short of pure fiction.

On this day that we remember Thomas we are asked to remember that the difference between a cynic and a person of faith is not as large as we might think. The cynic is someone who has been disappointed so often that they have given up on risking anything. By contrast, the person of faith is simply a cynic who is not content to let cynicism be the final word. Like atheists, people of faith are uncomfortably aware that nothing is as simple as it seems. But

unlike atheists, faith allows you to believe in something unquantifiable, something ineluctably elusive, even something transformative and redemptive.

Thomas stands as a potent reminder to us all of the importance for grounding our faith in the here and now. And he is a welcome scriptural antidote to the hoards of so-called spiritual writings determined to explain God's purposes to us in every last little detail. Against those who claim to know the inner workings of God's mind, Thomas is altogether more human and altogether more cautious. But this caution should not be confused with hostility or laziness.

As we strive to lay hold of the resurrection in our own lives I think we have a lot to learn from Thomas. But we also have a lot to learn from the other evidence presented to us this morning. Part of the information available to us today and not available to Thomas includes the response of the faithful to the resurrection over generations and generations. As we ponder our own response we need to confront head on the myth that somehow Thomas was in a better position than us to judge the authenticity of the resurrection.

The real truth of the matter is that Thomas was able to meet the risen Christ in one particular way at one particular time. But for those who believe the resurrection appearances have not ceased. While we are unlikely to see Jesus of Nazareth wandering along Wheelock street, it is not true that the resurrection life is purely a matter for the historians. Part of what we do today is remember that in the faithful response of Christians through the ages resurrection life continue to be manifest.

The real question facing us this morning, then, is not whether we particularly fancy Thomas as our favorite apostle. The real question is are we prepared to show the love of God and the forgiveness of God in our lives? If we are prepared to love and forgive without limit we will have answered the question of whether the resurrection really happened. For where we practice love and forgiveness, there is no doubting God's presence. Amen.