

Sermon for Easter 2 April 7, 2024

This gospel story contains the most important sentence you will hear today: “You may have life in Jesus name.”

When John talks about the miracle of Jesus’ presence among the disciples, he wraps up his account with that sentence: “You may have life in Jesus’ name.”

Life...

...there’s life and there’s life, though, right?

There’s life that is mere sleepwalking through the world. Life that is ours simply because we were born and exist in the world.

But then there’s another kind of life that Jesus is talking about, something more than just existing: a life imbued with love, peace, purpose.

And there are days when we cannot imagine ourselves having that kind of life. Because the bare existence kind of life gets in the way.

What gets in the way of life? What causes us to not engage in this life?

Fear. Doubt. Distraction.

Distraction is the easiest one to recognize. Cellphones – do you see people who seem to be so attached to their smartphones that they do not see the world around them?

Are there those among us that are so focused on what we DON’T have that we cannot see what we DO have?

What about fear, and doubt?

Do we have a sense that Jesus doesn't know us, and so we think we cannot know him? Might it actually be that Jesus knows us well, but we don't know how to sense his presence?

So this story of Thomas helps us see a little of what we must wrestle with if we are to live the Jesus life.

We know very little about him – he only is spoken of in the Gospel of John. He nickname is Didymus, or twin, but we don't know whose twin he is. We do know that he is a worried soul. When he speaks in John 11:16, it's when he and the other disciples try to dissuade Jesus from going to his dead friend Lazarus, and when it is clear that Jesus is going anyway despite the danger, Thomas says, "Let us go with him so that we might die with him." This is a person who sees the risks and names them. We generally are uncomfortable with folks like that, but it's important in any group to have someone who will speak the truth about the risks. Here he is once again naming an uncomfortable truth: how do we know that this is really Jesus whom you saw? Are we just so freaked out by what happened that we're hallucinating? I don't trust your report, because I'm not even sure I'd trust myself if I saw him. So if he comes back here again, I want to touch him, to put my fingers in his wounds. Then I'll know this is real.

Note something here: Thomas is not doubting Jesus, he is doubting the report that his fellow disciples have made to him. Because they are all hiding in an upper room, filled with fear and worry. He's saying the thing that no one else is willing to say: this might be a product of their fear rather than something real, and we've got to confirm it. He needs Jesus to confirm what they're saying.

Just before this gospel passage, we hear of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus in the Garden, when she is surprised by a stranger who turns out to be her Lord. She runs back and tells the other disciples, locked away in that upper room. We do not hear if they believed her, because we then have a repeat of what happened to her: Jesus appears in the upper room. He is showing the disciples he is risen, just as he showed Mary Magdalene he was risen.

He goes TO where those who need him are, he doesn't wait for them to come to him. And later, after Thomas expresses his doubt in their report, Jesus comes again because Thomas needs him. And Thomas confirms this strange and miraculous thing. And Thomas, and the rest of us, can live that kind of Jesus life because of the promise of this:

Jesus shows up. Jesus shows up when we're filled with doubt, either self-doubt or doubt of Jesus trusting us. Jesus shows up when we are afraid and our spines are getting weak, and he stands behind us and props us up. Jesus shows up with we're distracted by what we see on FaceBook or the news reports and have forgotten that he is our strength and salvation.

Jesus shows up when we, stuck in an endless loop of dealing with all of the stuff that fills our days, need to be reminded about what's important and what's not important.

Even when we're being whiny Eeyores, which is certainly what Thomas occasionally sounds like in John's gospel.

Jesus shows up. And that can give us the strength and the courage and the persistence to show up for Jesus. To live the Jesus life, a life filled with love and peace and purpose, despite all that tries to draw us away from that life.

It worked for Thomas. Here's the rest of the story: he is believed to have become a missionary to India, where he established a community of faithful Christ followers along the Malabar Coast in 52 AD. Today those followers, who are called Mar Thoma Christians, number over 1.2 million, and they are in communion with the Anglican Communion and with the Episcopal Church in America.

Not bad for someone who had doubts and needed real proof. Not bad for someone who wondered if Jesus really showed up. Perhaps when he realized that Jesus Christ really did show up, it gave him the courage and strength and perseverance to live the Jesus life sharing Jesus' words.

Perhaps we can have the courage and strength and perseverance to live the Jesus life too, knowing that Jesus will always show up for us when we need him. And for that, we all say "Alleluia, Amen!"