

Easter 2 (Year B) April 11, 2021 First Immanuel Lutheran

Pastor John Beck

Pray with me: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, our wounded, crucified and risen savior. Amen

Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

Last Sunday we celebrated Easter and it was a blowout. Even in a Zoom world it was wonderful: a big crowd; old friends connecting; wonderful music; the high quality preaching we have come to expect. Even in a Covid-19 world we celebrated in a way that was familiar and brought comfort, perhaps even excitement as we think perhaps a new day will break in soon, just like Jesus did.

And now, every year, this week we get the same downer gospel story about the disciples being hidden away behind locked doors.

Thomas, who has unfortunately been associated with doubt, and making doubt a bad thing, has been missing in action when Jesus shows up. And he wants proof of what the others have seen and heard. He still lived in the shadow of the cross; with the death of Jesus in his heart: the loss, the pain, the harsh reality of unforgiving life. He probably was sick of listening to those who were giddy with joy.

For me, I think there is a bit of Thomas in all of us. But let me make an I-statement. I have plenty of Thomas in me. I don't want to go anywhere for fear of the virus. When I go for my daily walk (I am now a Noom devotee and walk a lot) I usually see 20 people in my 30 minutes out, but usually only 1-2 people are wearing masks like me. Come on, people, I don't want to breathe in your aerosols.

Let me tell you my Thomas story. I am a raging and raving Portland Trailblazer basketball fan. In Portland, for the 13 years we lived here before we went away for ten years, I was captivated by the Blazers. They were the only big show in town. (Sorry, Timbers fans.) The Blazers were fun. There was an amazing sense of community as we would pile on the light-rail in our neighborhood and the car would fill to overflowing with fans as we headed for the then Rose Garden.

And my love continued even while living in Chicago for 5 years and even as we moved West to Lynnwood, Washington (north of Seattle).

But even more than loving the Blazers I am a miser, and we didn't have the more expensive cable plan that showed NBA games. In the spring of 2019 as the Blazers entered the playoffs I would go to friends' homes to watch the games, but that seemed rather rude, so two years ago on a Tuesday night I went to a local sports bar, with dozens of TVs and lots of cable. They let me watch the game and drink soda water for free. I was in my element. And it was going pretty well. The Blazers were up in the series 3-1 and if they won they would move on. And the game went pretty well. Back and forth, the Blazers ahead, then the Thunder, back and forth. Then the Blazers started building a lead. They were up by double digits. We got to the fourth quarter and things started to turn around, to go south. Really south. And suddenly they were down 5, 7, 10, 12, and 15 points.

What kind of a fan am I? I guess a fair-weather fan. Because as the adversity grew, I began to pack up my stuff and I headed home, disappointed, somewhat despondent. Came home, reported to Joan my sadness. And started working on church stuff.

But just before I went to bed I decided I would look and see how bad the final score had been. I go to ESPN on my computer and scroll down and can't seem to find the score. And then when I do find it, it says Blazers 118, Thunder 115. What! How can that be?

Turns out the Blazers made an incredible comeback, had the score tied, and with 8 seconds Damien Lillard faced down the Thunders' main guy and made a 37 foot (nearly half-court) shot that went in as the buzzer sounded. BLAZERS WIN, BLAZERS WIN. Oh, and that was Lillard's 50th point of the night – 50 points.

Commentators went on and on about that being one of the most incredible games and 4th quarters they have ever seen...and I had gone home, disappointed and discouraged.

I thought about that night as I read about Thomas and the disciples and the encounter with a crucified and risen Messiah.

They were in despair; they were discouraged and maybe even afraid; and Jesus comes and says, Peace, shalom, be with you. And he breathes on them. This is

the Gospel of John's Pentecost story, of the Spirit being given. He breathes on them.

And their world is changed.

And it is changed not because they had been such amazing followers; not because they had done anything except be normal human beings. Remember they had run away; they had stayed at the edges; Peter had even denied the Lord; they had given up; had lost hope.

But Jesus says, "Shalom be with you, as the Father send me, so I send you" Be my people who understand the power of forgiveness. And go practice it in the world.

Before I saw the final score, I sat at my computer that night in dismay, wishing things had been different; not knowing when I would risk another game and the disappointment I felt. It was probably incomparable to what Thomas felt. But he was in bad shape. "I will believe when I can touch his wounds and see for myself."

And then Jesus came and said, "Touch my wounds. Do not doubt but believe."

And so, ever since, Christians have been the ones who have touched wounds. In hospitals; on the battlefield during wars; alongside deathbeds; with the broken families whose loved ones have died of COVID; in the prisons; in the neighborhood, and school and of course also in our church faith community.

We touch the wounds of others because we know that in Jesus' death and resurrection, he has touched our wounds, and drawn us close to his loving heart.

Are there "Thomas Takeaways" for people 2,000 years later?

First, it is normal and ok for us to wonder, question, and be compromised by all that life throws at us.

Pandemics, relationships, the world falling apart so many places, getting older, the national situation, our children or our parents, our job or our lack of a job, our finances...and on and on the list can grow. Life is not easy and God knows that.

But God continues to come to us in any and all situations through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. And with this God provides both a spirit of comfort and challenge.

FIRST, there's THE COMFORT: I am with you, I accept you, I forgive you, I hold you in love.

SECOND, there's THE CHALLENGE: Trust me to be with you and get out there to spread the love.

It is that simple and that difficult.

FIRST, the comfort. You are loved!

SECOND, the challenge. Go, live the love!

And it begins at the Holy Table around which we gather, where today we are again reminded of Jesus' love: given and shed for you.

And it flows into our conversation and relationships: who will you talk to (through your mask) that you may not know so well? Who will you engage with (safely distanced) that might not be easy to love? What might be one small step for you as you grow into the new Spirit you receive as Jesus breathes on you?

Come to this table today and prepare for a spiritual and relational surprise. It might even rock your world.

What, the Blazers won. Alleluia!