

Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31
April 12, 2015

The Invisible World

When does something become real?

Is it only when we see it?

“Unless **I** see in his hands the print of the nails
And place **my** finger in the mark of the nails,
And place **my** hand in his side, I will not believe.”

We are people of the Book
People of the Word
It is the Word that announces that Christ is raised
So is it only when we hear it?

Or we sing these words:
“Taste and see, taste and see the goodness of the Lord”
Is it only when we taste it?

Thomas is invited to touch Jesus’ wounds – his palms
Stick his hand into Jesus’ side
Is it only when we are able to touch/feel that Christ becomes real?

What is common to each of these questions is the WE.

Does something become real only when WE see or hear or taste or touch?
Does the reality of something have to depend upon US?

Now, I’m going to give Thomas a hard time today which I have never done in 20 some years of preaching
Hard to do
Have to have a caveat first.

I love Thomas -- he’s real; he questions; he wants to go deep into faith and understanding;
He wants to know things for himself; I’ve called him previously Thomas the Seeker rather than the traditional Doubting Thomas

Or I’ve called him Thomas the Courageous One
He’s the one who when word comes to Jesus and his disciples that Jesus’ good friend Lazarus is sick unto dying in Bethany and Jesus says, “Let’s go.”

Some of his disciples protest:

“People want to kill you there!” “Are you kidding? Why would we go there?”

But not Thomas –

Thomas says,

“Let us also go that we may die with him;”
he’s ready to give his life with Jesus.

And then when Jesus invites the disciples in John 14 to
“Follow me,” Thomas is again the Courageous One who admits,
“We don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?”

It takes a lot of courage in a faith community to ask questions about what we don’t understand.
It shouldn’t.

And I think that is wrong.

I think it is why people leave church because they have unasked questions,
or they ask questions and are shut down.

I just heard a professor a few months ago talk about meeting a couple on a train in Europe and
when the professor and his pastor wife shared what their vocations were and why they were
touring Germany – something to do with being Lutheran - the woman said she used to be
Lutheran, but she got kicked out of confirmation for asking too many questions!

Even if people haven’t gotten kicked out – sometimes one can feel that it’s not okay or that they
will be judged.

So, our faith stays at one level instead of deepening because we have been taught to not question.
We have been taught it’s wrong to doubt rather than understanding that doubting and questioning
are part of faith and are part of what take us deeper into understanding that which at the same
time we will never fully understand.

Does that make sense?

God is safe from our questioning.

Our questioning doesn’t have the power to change the nature or reality of God.

Our prayers might change the course of a reality, but we don’t have to protect God.

We do need to protect people from abusive interpretations of God.

So back to this year’s sermon –

Does reality depend upon us?

And then, of course, who is the us?

African-Americans – men in particular, have experienced and known the systemic bias of police
departments for decades.

They have experienced it first hand,
Black men of all backgrounds.
They tell their stories.
The statistics tell the same stories.

But it's not truly been believed.
Because why? We have to experience it ourselves?
But if we aren't African-American and we aren't male, then we won't.

And part of me as a white woman standing before a predominantly white congregation wants to say, "I lived in the African-American community and I can tell you what I experienced; what I saw and heard; what I witnessed. Be a corroborator.

But then we would be back to the same question-
What makes something real?
Does it depend upon OUR seeing, touching, tasting, hearing?

It's complicated, isn't it?

Because the answer to that should be NO.
But now we have all seen and heard the shots of a police officer going into the back of an African-American man running away with no weapon.

Is it real now?
Or was it always real but we, whoever the we is, needed to see it for ourselves?

Of course, Jesus is always inviting us, the blind, to see
and the deaf to hear.

To take it out of such tortuously painful reality --
there is the question we've probably all heard:

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

Or does everything depend upon us?

Do you see how easy it is to make ourselves the center of the universe?

Is that which exists only that which we can apprehend through our senses?
Or is there a world beyond our senses?

That's the heart of faith; the heart of believing in God. Is it not?

That there is a reality beyond our knowing, beyond our capturing,
beyond our limited human understanding, beyond our ability to control.

For some that is frightening and bad news.
For people of faith it should be good news.
There is reality beyond our human capacity to destroy, to bend to our own desires.

Doesn't it make sense that the invisible world is so much larger than the visible? That there is something that depends not upon us?

“Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those you have not seen and yet believe.”

There is a world beyond our understanding.
God is beyond our understanding.

But God is not beyond our knowing.

In Christ, the invisible becomes visible.
The God beyond our understanding makes himself known in this human/divine being Jesus who reveals – who makes himself known most deeply by the wounds he is willing to bear for the sake of love.

And then we are pulled back into the invitation -
To taste and see;
To touch and believe;
To hear and tell;
To enter into the places in our lives and in the world where sorrow and pain lie
to not only be the presence of Christ
and witness to the presence of Christ
but to experience his presence all over again.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Amen.

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