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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation

12 March 26

2 Easter, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

Acts 2:14a

Psalm 16

1 Peter 3: 9

John 20:19-31

One bad moment, and Thomas gets tagged for eternity as the Doubter.

But that word, doubt, whatever its Greek origins, does not on the face of it, have bad connotations. It Doubt is the source of our pondering, our healthy skepticism, our need for a deeper understanding.

It is not the opposite of faith, rather, it can lead to a deepening of one's faith, a maturing, a grounding in one's faith.

This passage has been the jumping off point for homilies where the preacher chastises the people for doubting, for questioning, for skepticism. *Don't be like Thomas, whom Jesus had to chastise for doubting the Resurrection.* Well, not quite.

The opposite of faith is not doubt, but is, as often stated, *certainty*

We know so little of the stories of the Apostles before they were called, save some fragments. Working class, mostly, fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, John. Peter was or had been married, hence the cured mother-in-law, James, perhaps Jesus' cousin, and the other James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, another Simon, And the well-known grifter Matthew.

The others, with hardly any: Bartholomew, Philip, Judas Isacriot, who managed to purloin the coins, *and Thomas*.

In today's Gospel from John, the twelve, minus two, Iscariot, whose fate we suspect we know, and Thomas, who was not with the others late on the Sunday night following the execution of Jesus, gathered in the upper room. These ten —mostly young and physically fit, maybe with the exception of tax accountant—locked themselves into, well, likely the very room where they had had supper the previous Thursday evening. On the night Jesus had washed their feet, the night Jesus broke bread and then shared the wine, which he told them—to their utter amazement, and perhaps profound confusion—were in truth his body and blood, in the very the room where Jesus called them, not servants, but wondrously, friends. *His friends*.

Three nights later, they were in the grip of fear, not wanting to be identified as friends of Jesus. Wow. So much for loyalty and trust and friendship. When Mary Magdalene had earlier come to them with this wild and very good news, they ran away...and now they were running-in-place.

*Except Thomas.*

John writes that Jesus came to them—in some mysterious way in which he was discernible yet not quite, and offered them, instead of reproach, *peace*. Perhaps anticipating their own doubts, he offered his hands and his side. And then, in a remarkable and uncanny gesture, breathed on each of them, and as he breathed, he said to them: *Receive the Holy Spirit*.

Jesus' breath, source of spirit, holy spirit.

What could this have meant to them?

Breath, *Ruah* in Hebrew scripture, Spirit in the Gospels, *prana* in India, *pneuma*—soul, in the Greek.

His breath flowed into their bodies and into their souls, as his breath does us now, right now. We in/spire, we breathe in, we take in the divine presence. And we expire that same divine presence out into the world.

In that upper room, Jesus' breath dashed their fear, transformed them, and they came alive. Vital. Conscious. Exactly what we are invited to.

But their companion Thomas was not with them, and when they shared this good news with him, he declared he wanted to place his hand into the mark of the nails and the mark of the lance, into Jesus very flesh, or he would not believe.

We ought not scoff at Thomas. After all, the ten were drenched in fear until Jesus came amidst them, and breathed on them. He showed to them his hands and his flank, still open wounds inflicted by the Roman nails and the Roman lance.

Ten days later, Thomas is again with the ten and Jesus again appears. How diaphanous yet enfleshed must Jesus have seemed. He said to Thomas, *put your finger here, and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.. Do not doubt but believe.* To which Thomas proclaimed: *My Lord and my God.*

Many, many years ago, I was the dean of and taught theology in a Catholic girl's high school in San Francisco. I mainly taught sophomores, and if you remember your sophomore year, or you have raised a girl and remember how darling she was in those teen years, you can easily picture my classroom.

There were girls who were so good, they squeaked. Proper, well-spoken, never hiked their uniforms, never talked back, never rebelled. They were *certain*. They knew the rules. Their answers to my questions were usually rote, right out of the catechism, which elicited from them, as they completed their *perfect* answers, a very slight self-congratulatory smirk would appear on their lips.

These girls were not my favorites.

Then, there were the not-so-good girls. They hiked their uniforms, wore a full dollop of make-up, fiddled around when I was speaking, could, on occasion, be sassy, and questioned every single thing I said. I loved these girls, I loved their spunk, their audacity, and their genuine interest in learning about Jesus just below the biblical text. A Jesus for now, for their young lives, a Jesus alive in the chaos of being sixteen.

A couple of years ago, in our Tuesday morning scripture class, Lisa Pollard remarked that she read the scriptures *slant*. Yes, she read them *slant*. I thought that was perfect. We are called to read them *slant*, with an eye for the oft-hidden deeper truth.

Thomas was *slant*, I surmise. He asked a provocative question and staked his belief on its corporal answer. Of course, the trepidatious ten had quivered in fear until Jesus appeared to them, offering his wounds as a testament. Thomas wanted his moment of truth, too.

Jesus reminded him, and them, that they believed for they had seen, but blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

This must be for you and me. But we do see. At Open Table this morning, Jesus showed his face, and some nasty wounds. He was in the middle of Mendocino Avenue the other day, ranting and stumbling about, and was shot by the constabulary for his errant behavior. Jesus is at home, too, right now, sulking in her room, having been betrayed by her bestie, wallowing in the despair only a sixteen-year-old can feel.

For Jesus is everywhere we are, inviting us—even after Easter! —to take up our cross to begin again our part of breathing, on each other, on each one we meet, at Open Table, on Mendo, in our beloved daughter's locked room, all just waiting for love to come calling, panting for the breath that bears the love of God.

The holy abbess Hildegard of Bingen described herself exquisitely as *a feather on the breath of God*.

And aren't we all.

