

Doubt.

No doubt.

I have my doubts.

Don't we all. And what models we have for doubting in these forlorn disciples in today's Gospel from Luke.

We doubt. How could we not? Doubt is part and parcel, and its necessary. So much vital doubt gets shoved into the psyche's shadow, never to see the light of day, never to be *honored*.

Luke writes: *They were still talking about this when he himself stood among them and said—as we will in a few minutes to one another—Peace be with you!*

The responses of these, his dearest friends: *startled and terrified*. They thought they were seeing a ghost! Some diaphanous being, perhaps even macabre, maybe a shared delusion.

This *One*, this *Holy One*, this *One* who loved them, this *One* who several days earlier, tenderly—and with humility—washed their feet and with them, broke bread—as we will do in a few minutes—this *One* now perceived as a *ghost*.

Jesus, no ghost, but *One* transformed, asked: *Why are you so agitated? Why are these doubts rising in your hearts?*

Had their trust been squashed? Most likely not, but doubt nonetheless overcame them. Doubt and perhaps faith, all at once.

Doubt and faith, an Episcopalian specialty perhaps. Doubt, the earnest stepchild of reason, yet of so much seemingly beyond our grasp, beyond our understanding, beyond our control.

We ask, maybe daily: *Why? Why me? Why is it so?*

We want incontrovertible proof, a cosmic explanation, some material assurance.

And Jesus, looking into their hearts, continues: *Look at my hands and feet. It is I indeed. Touch **me** and see for yourselves.*

This instruction, I suggest, was not meant merely for the eleven, gathered to wail and moan and grieve the inconsolable loss of their dear friend, who was certainly that, and inconceivably more.

They had just been grilling fish, reminiscent of the meal they shared with Jesus, just days before. Now bereft, without the presence of their utterly beautiful friend. They were overwhelmed with doubt, as Jesus insightfully perceived, doubts *rising in their hearts*.

Me, too, on many days, somedays blindingly so. And perhaps, you as well. Perhaps all of us, we humans. Sometimes it seems all we have is doubt.

Several years ago, I found myself in what I came to describe as my Dark Wood, really more like a desert. As a man drawn to Jesus, I found myself only a man of disquieting doubt. Many doubts, it seemed, only doubts. This dark wood lasted for some time. I felt alone, and a bit scared, and mostly sad. My dear companion Jesus was not to be found. My prayer dissipated, my *joie de vivre* became *no vivre*, and hope, always the first virtue the Irish throw off the boat, sank as did this beloved *Anchor* of my life.

I had thought I was in charge of my life, that I had some level of control, that I could just will myself out of this dark wood.

But that was not to be. And *that* powerlessness, doubt's companion, ultimately became the *grace* of my wood, the grace that was the doubt, the unquenched grace of my tentative faith.

Jesus gave these beloveds this instruction: *touch me and see for yourself?* Touch my wounds, my body, me. Do this brazen, sacred thing.

Two weeks ago, on the night we commemorated the Lord's Supper, we washed each other's feet, a humbling and holy task. The next day, we knelt and kissed the crossbeam, whose wood held the memory of Jesus' torturous death. Twenty-four hours later, or perhaps 36, we collectively harmonized the Alleluia chorus and rang tiny copper bells, and we stomped around this church as if we meant it. Cuz we did! What joy!

We washed feet, broke bread, kissed wood, and made a joyful, loud, stomping noise.

Those feet we washed, perhaps the invisibly punctured ones, like those of Jesus. That cross, perhaps like one we might have borne or will yet, our sharing in the ignominious death of Jesus. That stomping joy, the felt presence of Jesus in our midst, like the presence we feel in the Eucharist this morning, every Sunday morning.

And yet, yesterday, or maybe last Wednesday, or maybe earlier this morning, we reverted to our so human doubts.

I have come to understand this doubt as a *gift*. Our doubts bring us to our knees, they educate our strong-willed selves, and they bring us back into this sacred space, this redwood chapel, each week. This very doubt ultimately draws us closer to Jesus, close

enough to touch him, become part of his body, as he becomes part of ours. Over time, we move deeply into the mystery, that is our graced destiny. In doubt, we plumb the depths to know him evermore clearly, to live him every more readily, and to trust him ever more fully.

Our doubt leads us to the humility necessary to throw ourselves onto his holy person, to kiss his hands and feet. We do this in our dumbness, in our despair, and, too, in our gratitude, in our desire to be always more fully human. More like Jesus.

On those recent Triduum days, as perhaps every day, we are given this Christic presence, sometimes so robustly we feel it might just burst from inside. And we discover, yet again, that, despite and because of our doubts, this most essential, absolute, transforming truth, the truth at the heart of our quest, Jesus' always bottom line: we are loved, deeply loved.

Each of us, we are loved. And through grace, we find out how to love each other. And we find a way to take our love to the streets.

To quote a friend: *We cannot keep it in!*

At Easter vigil, this house was on metaphorical fire! As were we, and still are, even when we can't quite always feel the flame.

As I drove home at quarter to midnight Easter eve, all doubt cleared away. I could share some broiled fish with Jesus, some squishy marshmallow yellow. Easter peeps with you. And Easter Monday came, and I was once again entertaining doubt and simultaneously its sister, a trusting faith, necessarily twinned, necessarily a part of my journey, and of yours, too.

And so, we come back, to Jesus, present and absent and present, to look upon his sacred hands and feet, to lovingly kiss those hands and feet.

And to touch them in each other, as we greet one another with his Peace. To touch them in the unhoused woman who came this morning to Open Table to have broiled fish, or its best breakfast facsimile, to touch, as Jesus did, the world's wounded, of which we are, too, a part, as we take this love beyond Incarnation's Mendocino doors, into all the streets on which we travel.

We live an embodied faith. Our doubts may haunt the mind, but our souls, deeply entangled in our bodies, they know something else. Something more, something reason cannot know.

A Shinto sage wrote in 11th century Japan:

*What is it that dwelleth here
I know not.*

*Yet my heart is full of awe
And the tears trickle down...*

And don't we know that.

Luke concludes: *Their joy was so great they still could not believe it, and they stood there dumbfounded.*

Like us, no doubt.