

## Being One

Poor Saint Thomas.

How many of us know him only by that unfair and yet stuck like glue nickname "Doubting Thomas?"

After all, he isn't asking for anything more than the other disciples already got: he wanted to see, to touch, to be convinced with his own eyes and ears and finger tips - which is exactly what the others were privy to in Jesus' first appearance to them the week before.

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

Do you hear the order of things?

Jesus appears to the ten, only Judas and Thomas are absent.

Jesus appears --- no reaction.

"Peace be with you," he says --- no reaction.

He shows them the wounded hands, the rip in his side --- aha!  
They rejoice!

Thomas only wants what they got; but he gets stuck with the nickname.

Poor Thomas!

There is so much more to him than most folks know.

Remember when Jesus hung out for two days in another town when he gets word that Lazarus is dying?

He waits there until Lazarus finally dies; and when Lazarus does die, that's when Jesus decides to head to Bethany to see him?

The disciples warn Jesus that to leave where they are is to invite stoning by the Jewish authorities --- and it is Thomas who pipes up: "Come, let us go and die with him!"

Thomas the brave!

And there is more.

As Jesus waxes eloquently in John's Gospel about leaving the disciples, and going to prepare a place for them, and telling them that they all know the way; it is Thomas who speaks up for the confusion swimming in all the disciples heads and says: "Lord, we don't know the way!"

Which allows Jesus to reply: "I am the way, the truth and the life...."

Thomas the bold!

And there is more.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, legend has it that Thomas took the missionary command of Jesus all the way to India; where he spread the gospel in that most distant land; the farthest traveling disciple of them all.

Thomas the diligent.

And that's all we knew about Thomas until around 1945 when an Egyptian shepherd stumbled upon a cave that had been buried for perhaps 1500 years.

In the cave was a large urn, and in the urn were a number of manuscripts, including one called The Gospel of Thomas.

The Gospel of Thomas contains 114 sayings and parables attributed to Jesus.

It has no passion story, nothing about the crucifixion or resurrection; only sayings, only parables.

And while scholars first thought this gospel was a later creation, maybe in 200 or 300 AD; with more scholarship and research, the thinking today is that most or all of the Gospel of Thomas is at least as old as the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.

Some sayings in Thomas' Gospel are very familiar to us:

"Do not tell lies and do not do what you hate, because all things are revealed before heaven. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered up that will not be uncovered."

And:

"You see the sliver in your brother's eye but you do not see the timber in your own eye. When you take the timber out of your own eye, then you will see well enough to remove the sliver from your brother's eye."

These sayings of Jesus, recorded in the Gospel of Thomas, are very much like sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels we are more familiar with.

And yet, other sayings of Jesus are far more mystical than we are used to hearing – yet even these sayings seem to be whispered, alluded to, suggested, in the gospels with which we are familiar.

And so, according to Thomas, Jesus says:

“If your leaders say to you, ‘Look, the Kingdom is in heaven,’ then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you, ‘it is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside you and outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are poverty.”

And this as well: “Jesus says:

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make your eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter the kingdom.”

It is Mark’s Gospel that tells us that Jesus only taught in parables so that

“they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

Kind of shakes up your plastic Jesus image; gentle Jesus meek and mild....,eh?

These sayings of Jesus sound very much like Zen koans: those difficult sayings like: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

These sayings of Jesus are intended to crack open our usual way of looking at life; our usual way of looking at ourselves; and in that cracking open; to allow us, on rare occasions, to catch a glimpse of what is really real.

We each of us know when we are fragmented; when worries or anxieties or wants or fears or ambitions cause our own sense of unity to be only a long ago dream – we know what it feels like to live lives of broken glass.

So where, in the midst of such lives, do we meet the risen Lord?

Perhaps we shall meet him at the same place he met the apostles.

He showed them his wounds.

In his wounds they encountered Jesus once again.

Gather any community together, and you will find wounds.

You have them.

So do I.

Illness. Addiction. Anger and humiliation.

A lost husband or wife, even a lost child.

Divorce. Unemployment. Personal demons...

Wounds are what we share.

And perhaps what Jesus is saying to us today, particularly in his encounter with Thomas, is that it is at the intersection of our lives and our wounds where we may encounter the risen Lord.

“Perhaps the nail scarred Jesus meets us when we touch the scars of the wounded places in our own lives.” [Harnash, Strength Through Broken Places.]

Put another way, a wound is a hole in the fence, where we might escape the smallness of the world as we would define it, and enter the vastness of a world defined by God. [Gene Peterson, paraphrase]

The risen Jesus is not some spirit that pain cannot touch.

Even in resurrection, he bears the marks, the scars, the wounds, for all eternity.

They are transformed; but they remain.

And something else too: that breath that he breathed into them?

It is the same breath God breathed into Adam.

With God’s breath, a creature made of dirt became a human being.

Now, with the breath of Jesus, human beings, you and I, are given back the place intended for us from the very beginning.

To be little less than angels.

To be sons and daughters of God.

And what is the sign of that restoration?

It is in today’s gospel as well.

Remember the ruckus Jesus caused as he went around forgiving sins?

The best people were outraged.

Only God can forgive sins!

Except today, Jesus gives us that power.

Power to forgive.

Power to withhold forgiveness.

This amazing power, given to us by the God who forgives us all.

Forgiveness is the sign of this new life we share.

Come, he invites, touch my wounds; touch your own, and see me alive in the deepest mysteries of your life.

Making the two one, becoming in your own life, both male and female, coming to know ourselves so that we may be known

"See me when you ask for forgiveness," Jesus says.

"See me when you give it," he beckons.

Do not be unbelieving, but believe! +amen