

**Second Sunday of Easter (or Sunday of Divine Mercy) Lectionary: 43
April 19, 2020 +**

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Today's Gospel is not the story of "*Doubting Thomas*." Dear Thomas has, for centuries, been labeled "doubting" – perhaps accurately, perhaps pejoratively – yet the Gospel never actually uses that word. Instead, the Gospel of John draws us into an account of a person who was absent at the early appearances of the Risen Jesus and is struggling with the testimonies of others about this Jesus with whom he had been in a profound relationship.

And it's not just Thomas who was absent. John writes this passage in such a way that he includes his audience in the experience. We too, like Thomas, share the same experience of absence. We were not there when the Risen Jesus first appeared to the disciples. We have to rely on the testimony of others who already believe.¹

Thomas had only known Jesus as his friend, companion and teacher – together they lived, traveled and tended to the people throughout Galilee, Judea and the surrounding area. He had always been in relationship with Jesus in a personal and particular way. He never needed the testimony of others because he himself experienced Jesus.

But after Jesus' death and resurrection, everything changed. Outside of relationship with Jesus, how was Thomas to know that indeed his friend, companion and teacher had risen?

Perhaps the story of Thomas is less about the experience of doubting and more about the experience of relationship ... and Thomas' struggle to not just to *know* about Jesus, to hear the testimony, to read of his deeds. But, to truly be in relationship with Jesus, even when we fear that now of all times, Jesus is absent.

Thomas had every reason to demand not just testimony – but *direct relationship* with the Risen Jesus. It's what he already had experienced throughout his life with Jesus. Perhaps he trusted so much in that relationship that he believed that no resurrection was possible without a continuation of relationship to Jesus. Like the other disciples, Thomas likely could not imagine how that would happen, how it would feel, what it would be like to be in relationship with the Risen Jesus.

Scripture corroborates Thomas' intuition for it is impossible to truly understand Jesus the Christ outside of relationship.

¹ Insight from Schliesser, Benjamin (2017). To touch or not to touch? : doubting and touching in John 20:24-29. *Early Christianity*, 8(1):69-93 at <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/144366/1/ZORA144366.pdf>

From birth to death to resurrection, from alpha to omega, we learn in the Gospels that Jesus is constantly in relationship with others. In Matthew, we begin with an account of the genealogy of Jesus: who is related to whom, who beget whom. (Matthew 1) Luke brings us to the doorsteps of Elizabeth and of Mary. Each woman's "yes" to God takes place in the context of relationship with God through the angel Gabriel. (Luke 1) With Joseph, the shepherds and later the Kings of the East, Simeon, and Anna – Jesus story is told through his relationships with others.

Even the Gospel of John, with its more transcendent approach, begins by telling us that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word was present to God from the beginning. All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life and the life was the light of all people." (John 1:1-4) Listen to these words telling us the story of Jesus the Christ through relationship – relationship with God, relationship with all things – the whole universe and relationship with all people.

"All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word, not one thing came into being."

And of course, we see relationship throughout Jesus' life. As we walk with Jesus, we pass through stories of friendship, family, healing, food and drink, rebuke, conversion, love, suffering, grief and death. We are even brought into Jesus' experience of the sacred universe as he partners with the elements of Earth in his mission – water and dirt to heal those who are blinded, bread and wine to bring about full communion to a fragile world.

Finally, just one week ago, we heard how Mary of Magdala came to know the Risen Jesus through the intimate calling of her name. "Mariam." Her response came directly out of the relationship she shared with Jesus. "Rabbouni."

Today, we can imagine the Risen Jesus appearing again to the disciples, this time with Thomas, who now hears the intimate calling of his name. "Thomas." And his response ... "My Lord and my God."

Let us remember this day, not one who doubted, but one who so longed for relationship with Jesus that nothing else would suffice, not even the testimony of his friends. May we too never settle for knowing something *about* Jesus the Christ; rather may we ever long for Jesus and trust that Jesus will always meet our longing with the intimate calling of our name. Let us open our heart to all that is ... listen ... and make every moment of our lives our response to God.

Written by Julie Vieira, IHM