

## **LFLC Sermon for April 11, 2021 – John 20:19 -31**

There is a story about 3 Clergy in a small town who got to know each other and started to share an annual fishing trip. They went to an isolated lake and rented a cabin where all the food had been purchased in advance. But this particular year, someone had missed an assignment and when the clergy arrived late in the evening, there was no food to be found. They searched the tiny kitchen and uncovered a couple of cans of beans long past their best-before-date. But they took a chance, shared the beans and went to bed.

By 2 AM they were all awake, terribly ill and moaning. They decided they better get to the local clinic for some help. The young doctor in the village had to be awakened and when he found the clergy they were in really bad shape. He panicked a bit but said he would call the ambulance service which was an hour away. In the meantime – just in case – did they have any final request?

“Oh, yes!” said the Presbyterian. “Please call my wife and tell her the news.”

“Me, too”, said the Anglican, “Call my Bishop to ask for prayers.”

The third clergy was a Lutheran. He heard the doctor’s request and replied: “Final request? . . . yes, I have a final request . . . I would like a second opinion!”

On this basis alone, there is evidence that the disciple Thomas was indeed the first Lutheran.

Most of us are a bit partial to Thomas. He stood his ground; asked questions most of us would be too shy to ask.

We met Thomas when the news came to Jesus that Lazarus was ill. Jesus said a visit to the family would be dangerous as enemies were about. It was Thomas who said, “Come on, let’s go, that we may die with Jesus!”

Then, on the night when Jesus washes his disciple’s feet, just before his arrest, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going ahead to prepare a place for them . . . Jesus says: You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas pipes up, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” And we hear Jesus’ immortal words, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

There were probably days when the other 11 disciples thought Jesus called the wrong twin. But Thomas was not impressed by the abstract, he was no dreamer – just the facts, please!

I often wish we knew more about each of the disciples and their characters, their natures.

The Psychologist Karl Jung devised a system of classifying personality types along 4 basic continuums.

75% of people are extroverts, the rest introverts

75% of people get information from facts, science, proofs – the rest more by intuition

I am no psychologist so won't be the fool who rushes in. But how do we communicate good news to people who perceive information differently?

When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life", some of us are deeply moved. Others, like Thomas, say,

"We don't know the way, so how do we know where you are going?"

"Jesus is Risen! Hallelujah" vs. "Oh yeah? So where is he?"

Most Clergy are introverts – most parishioners are extroverts. Can we connect?

How do we communicate the power and joy of Easter to a population where 75% of the people do not want poetry or conjecture, but facts please?!

If we say Jesus is Risen, then people wonder, then why so much death – war, oppression, illness, hatred?

What difference does Easter make to the Dow-Jones Index? To Myanmar? The Rohingya? Covid 19?

There is no doubt that faith must touch the heart, the spirit. Is that not what we would define as conversion? A radical reorientation of mind, heart, spirit? Some carry that blessing from youth. I have a clergy friend who tells me there was never a time when she did not believe in Jesus as her Lord and Saviour.

Most of us, myself included, come to faith after we tried everything else. I confess I didn't find Jesus but he found me – and for that I am eternally grateful. We experience grace – the healing **of head and heart**, forgiveness and reconciliation.

I also confess that when I hear Jesus say, "I am the way, the truth and the life" it speaks to my heart, my imagination, my inner journey. Had I been at the Table on that night, I would not have asked Jesus what he meant and I would have been irritated and embarrassed by Thomas.

But, we need Thomas, don't we? "Stop speaking in riddles, Jesus, and tell us where exactly you are going and give us some directions, please!"

"Ok, OK, you others said Jesus appeared to you, but maybe it was mass hysteria – I want some proof before I believe."

But Jesus came to see Thomas – he did not rebuke him, but showed him his wounds. Thomas was not shy and gave the confession that all humanity will someday share, "My Lord and my God!"

Excuse me if I jump around a bit. But my journey last week took me to different places. I do spiritual direction and I had given one person I work with the passage from John 21 to pray – the story of Jesus cooking breakfast on the beach and then the time of reconciliation with Peter – Peter, do you love me?

Tucked into that story is an interesting sidebar. Peter points to the disciple whom Jesus loved, we assume that to be John, and asks Jesus, “What about him?” I take that to mean, what about that dreamer- what’s he supposed to do? Jesus told Peter not to worry about him, get on with your business.

There is in us that yearning for truth, beauty, harmony. To be in a great cathedral and hear the music of Bach, to see the stained glass, the art work, feel the presence of the saints.

There is also the need to look in the eyes of the poor, the broken, the refugee, the victims of violence, racism, hatred and war. To see them not as problems, but as sisters and brothers who need our help. How do we turn our backs so easily at times?

The truth is, of course, we need each other.

We need our musicians and artists, our poets and mystics. We need to trace the birds of the air and behold the flowers of the field. To look up and out and glimpse God’s grandeur. We need to sing with the Psalmists. We need to live in harmony and share our resources like those we read about in Acts.

We need people who can balance budgets, fix things, build things, talk common sense, make friends in the world and challenge us to stop talking and do something.

The deep challenge all of us face is to remember the Risen Christ who stands before the Disciples.

2 things: Peace be with you and the Risen Lord bears the scars of his wounds. He is, as Henri Nouwen says, our Wounded Healer.

The deep peace of Jesus is our life and our blessing – it carries us into the world. It is the source of joy and wonder, hope and trust.

But the world that crucified Jesus is still out there.

On the Lutheran Church’s website this week, there is a list of the Saints and notables we might remember. One of them was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran Pastor who broke with the established Church to struggle against Nazism. He was killed in prison a few weeks before Hitler fell. Many have felt that Hitler wanted Bonhoeffer dead.

Bonhoeffer’s most famous phrase is ‘Cheap Grace’. He wrote:

*“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”*

This is the Church that bears the wounds of Jesus.

But how hard that path is without one another; without a vision a hope, a dream, the presence Christ within the community.

In India, there is a Cathedral called St. Thomas. 12<sup>th</sup> century relics of the early Thomist churches are still to be seen in Italy. Many Indian Christians are still called Thomist. Yes, practical Thomas was a missionary who travelled afar in Jesus’ name and built things.

That other unnamed Disciple whom Jesus loved and who we think was John, was a masterful writer. His Gospel is full of wonder and mystery, artistry and beauty. Legend suggests he was the only one of the 12 who died of old age. His legacy of gifting the Church with the beauty of Christ will forever stir the searching heart.

Christ needs us all – with all our gifts and all our peculiarities. And I believe in this age, Christ urges us to be brave, to have courage, to choose the way of the Cross.

There is too much cheap grace about. Too many websites offering answers to our problems. Too many ways to avoid those to whom Jesus would minister.

We know the way of Jesus; we know where he is going. Now, for those who do not know him, how will they know? How will they believe?

Thomas, according to John, yes, that brash, give me the facts, character . . . when he saw Jesus’ wounds uttered, **MY, Lord and my God.**

And it was this Thomas through whom Jesus shared his final Beatitude:

Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen me but believe.**

And blessed are those who, like Thomas, remind us that in the season of wonder, possibility, beauty – there is - ahem – work to do.