

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal, Easter 2B, 4/7/2024, John 20:19-31 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Easter Sunday may be behind us, but Easter is a fifty-day season that has just begun, and on the second Sunday of Easter we always have the same story: this snippet from John, featuring Thomas. Often maligned as Doubting Thomas, even though Thomas was the brave one who was actually out while the other disciples were locked away because they were afraid.

The text says the doors were locked “for fear of the Jews,” so I need to remind us all that when John uses “the Jews” he is not writing about all Jewish people. Jesus and his locked-up disciples were all Jews themselves. At the time the Gospel of John was written there was considerable strife between the followers of Jesus and other Jewish people. John would have been horrified by the way his words have been used to support antisemitism. Jesus was born, died, and resurrected as a Jew.

So back to Thomas. Instead of Doubting Thomas, I prefer to think of him as Skeptical Thomas. Who wouldn't have been skeptical in this instance? These men were huddled together behind locked doors and then claimed they had seen their dead leader. Naturally he was skeptical. And I bet a part of him wondered why, when he was the one doing the brave thing by venturing out, he didn't get to share in a miracle. That hardly seems fair. The others were being controlled by their fear, and he was trying to do the right thing. Poor Thomas.

Is skepticism a bad thing? I hope not, because I'm certainly a skeptic. My husband calls me “Dr. No” because my first impulse whenever he suggests something is to say no. No, I don't want to go there or eat that or engage in that activity. Now before he makes a suggestion he tells me to just say no and get it out of my system so I can listen. But honestly, even though he's not Dr. No, Gary is skeptical too. Many of us are. And Jesus meets us skeptics where we are, just as Jesus met those disciples huddled in fear where they were, walking right through the locked door.

Fear shows up as a problem in the Bible far more often than skepticism. What are you afraid of? What gets in the way of your faith? What makes you lock the doors and huddle inside?

I'm afraid of stepping down as rector. I'm afraid that you'll have trouble finding someone to work part-time. I'm worried that some people will leave during the transition and go to another church or, far worse, start missing church on Sunday mornings.

If I give in to those fears and lock the doors, then I'm putting too much faith in myself instead of Jesus. I'm not the savior of St. David's: Jesus is. He is the head of the church, as it says on the front page of our bulletin, and you all are the ministers. I'm just the current rector. The church will be fine without me.

Maybe you have fears about this, too. Maybe you have fears about my health. I've gotten a lot worse than I was just two weeks ago, and definitely since a month ago. Such fears are understandable. I have them too, as do members of my family. But Christ defeated death, as we celebrated not only last Sunday, Easter Sunday, but for the fifty days following. As Christians, we do not need to fear what comes next.

But just because we don't need to be afraid does not mean our faith makes anything easy. Jesus said to Thomas: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." In an article for the *Christian Century*, writer and priest Heidi Haverkamp wrote, "even in the wake of the resurrection, we must not look away from the wounds of Christ. We are the body of Christ—Christ's wounds are in us and in our neighbors, yet there are ways we ignore them or look away."

There are ways we ignore Christ's wounds or look away.

St. David's is in a nice neighborhood, isn't it? We're in the suburbs. Economic issues and food insecurity can be easier to hide or ignore in the suburbs. I felt a little excited when our new little free food pantry was cleaned out a couple of weeks ago because it showed that we were meeting a need. But it's such a small drop in a sea of food insecurity, and we need to make ourselves look at the wounds in our neighbors. I'm grateful for the ways we do this, not only with our little free pantry but through our monthly collections for CCHASM and the monthly meal for the HomeAgain men's shelter. But often the same people do this work again and again, while others of us ignore it. Or maybe we bring in a can of beans, but don't think about it again. About how it must feel to take a can of beans someone else procured in order to feed your family. What is the story of the person who will eat that food that you donated? How can we become more aware of the wounds of the world without becoming overwhelmed? Without just locking ourselves away like those disciples after the crucifixion?

On a smaller scale, with another wound: our church is going to be fine without me as rector, but my leaving before I want to and before most of you want me to is a wound. I hope that in the coming month we can bravely acknowledge that and make the most of our remaining time together.

As we journey through the fifty-day season of Easter together, with the extra alleluias, I invite us all to examine our fears and our wounds, with a skeptical and loving eye. What are you afraid of? How does Jesus meet you in your fear?