

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

April 11, 2021

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B

The readings this week:

- Acts 4:32-35 ◦ Psalm 133
- 1 John 1:1 - 2:2 ◦ John 20:19-31



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Speaking to the Soul: Touching Faith

Lucky Thomas, he literally got hands-on proof to bolster his faith. We will have to wait a little longer for that awesome experience. Until that time, Jesus tells us we are blessed because we believe in what we do not see. But before we congratulate ourselves on a pious achievement, we should understand that our faith is entirely a gift from God. It is his grace infused in us, not a virtue generated by us. Our job is to cooperate with God's grace... to nurture, protect and share it. That means our faith cannot be rationed, hoarded or hidden. Jesus did not go to the cross so that closet Christians could slink under the radar of an increasingly cynical, secular world.

This week let's use the lesson of the upper room to probe the nature of faith... what it is... what it means to us... and what we should do with it. First let's look at what faith isn't. Faith was never meant to be an affirmation of some frail, static body of beliefs, incapable of surviving a collision with empirical evidence. Our faith is dynamic and vibrant. It is not the enemy of reason. It welcomes scientific revelations from Darwin to "The Big Bang." As Jesuit anthropologist and theologian Teilhard de Chardin explained: "Faith has need of the whole truth." We welcome scientific breakthroughs as further proof of the endless wonders of creation and the endless glory of the Creator.

But we simply can't reason our way to faith. It is not an intellectual exercise. Neither is it a scriptural abstraction for theologians to parse. Faith is a fire that burns within us, fueled by God's grace. We must tend the fire or be left in the cold ashes of indifference. Constant fidelity is the ideal of faith. But few of us achieve it. We are human. We get tired. We get distracted. We are sinners. We serve our pride and our appetites. We stray from our faith. We may even deny it. But faith is not our creation. We did not will it into being, anymore than we willed ourselves into being.

Faith is our response to God. It is the vehicle he has created to give himself to us... to connect with us... to draw us to him. Jesus is ever ready to bring faith into the upper room of our neglect and rejection. But Christ will not coerce us into belief. We must truly work out our own salvation. We must have the will to believe. Ever since

baptism, when Christ claimed us for his own, saving grace has lived in us waiting every day to be worked out.

"Out" is the operative word. No matter how humble or reserved our character, we were never meant to tip-toe through life keeping our faith a closely guarded secret. In word and deed our faith must be proclaimed. And not just on Easter, Christmas or the occasional Sunday... that's not faith. That's casual observance of tradition. True Christian faith is all-pervasive. It shapes our personality. It governs our conduct. In all things, we must put faith first.

The disciples came together in fear; they went out together in faith. Conviction replaced confusion. They drew strength from Jesus and shared it with each other. That



is the social model of our faith community to this day. The light of faith does not burn uniformly in all of us, all the time. That is why we come together in need and in plenty. We support each other in prayer and fellowship. We instill and reinforce the habits of faith in our loved ones. We share our faith and we see it flower all around us. Faith builds on faith ... it is the ultimate virtuous cycle.

As Paul teaches us: of "Faith, Hope and Charity"... Charity is the greatest of all. But it is "Faith" that comes first of all. This is not a random ranking. As St. Ignatius of Antioch explains: "Faith is the beginning and the end is love. God is the two of them brought into unity."

So, thank you, Thomas. Your doubts made this lesson possible. You touched the risen Lord... and from that touch your new conviction affirms our own. Thank you, Father. You are the Alpha and Omega of our ever-evolving universe. You give us the grace to broaden and deepen our faith... to make it more resilient... to make it more responsive to your will. Thank you, Jesus. You are the Savior of the world. This Eastertime, our faith is risen once again in you. Alleluia.

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Acts 4:32-35](#)

As human beings, we are often driven to get stuff and to keep stuff – even at great personal cost. Why do you think this is so? What kind of mood do you feel in this passage among those early Christians? The first verse of our passage holds a key to our understanding. Why does the writer say that the believers shared everything they had? Why do you think this caused them to share so freely? Did the Christ-followers share only with each other? Consider for a moment all the things these men and women had experienced since Jesus' crucifixion – the resurrection, Jesus' appearances, his ascension, Pentecost... what did these events teach the followers about themselves? About God? About the world and the things they owned? Why do you think it is so difficult for us to let go of our fear about having material possessions? How would our lives look like if we viewed our material possessions through eyes of faith? How would our churches look? Our communities? [Faith Element](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 133](#)

When was the first time you became aware of your ethnicity? Have you ever found yourself feeling self-conscious about your ethnicity? If so, why? When you encounter the topic of ethnicity and injustice, what is your initial or primary reaction? In Psalm 133:1, the psalmist described unity among the brethren as “good”, using the same Hebrew descriptor that God used to describe His creation in Genesis Read John 17:20-26 and Ephesians 2:13-22 and consider the nature of the unity that God desires in His body. In your own words, how would you describe God's desire for unity in His body and His heart for justice? What does the term “unity” mean to you? In Psalm 133, the Hebrew term for unity effectively means ‘oneness of heart’. Have you ever seen or experienced this sort of deep unity in diversity? If so, how did it look and/or feel to you? If not, to what do you attribute its absence, and what do you think may be missing in your life as a result? [McLean Bible Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

May you trust in God's promises to his people:
peace
security
blessing
even when they are difficult to believe.
May you know that God's news is good news,
nourishing
true
even when people tell you it is not.
And when you encounter doubt,
may you strengthen your belief
guiding you in his perfect wisdom and counsel.

~ [Jeff's Blog](#)

Jesus invites each one of us, through Thomas, to touch not only his wounds, but those wounds in others and in ourselves, wounds that can make us hate others and ourselves and can be a sign of separation and division. These wounds will be transformed into a sign of forgiveness through the love of Jesus and will bring people together in love. These wounds reveal that we need each other. These wounds become the place of mutual compassion, of indwelling and of thanksgiving.

We, too, will show our wounds when we are with him in the kingdom, revealing our brokenness and the healing power of Jesus.

~ Jean Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John, via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [1 John 1:1 - 2:2](#)

How did John witness Jesus with his senses? What are two purposes of this epistle? What is said about God with regard to light and darkness? How do we have fellowship with God and with one another? Why do you think that John was the author of this epistle? How is our fellowship both “vertical and horizontal?” What is another purpose that John gives for this epistle? What is an advocate? [Doing Good](#)

___ 4th Reading: [John 20:19-31](#)

What are some possible reasons why Mary didn't recognize Jesus? What did Jesus say that prompted Mary to recognize him? What does the fact that the first eyewitness to the resurrection is a woman confirm about the reality of the resurrection? How did the disciples receive the message of the resurrected Jesus that Mary delivered? How does the reality of the resurrection reverse the discouragement for the disciples? Has the reality of the resurrection reversed your discouragement in life? If so, how? Which disciple is not present when Jesus appears to them the evening of the first day? How much time passes before Thomas actually sees the resurrected Jesus? Does this seem like a long time to be in doubt about the resurrection? How did the resurrection of Jesus change Mary? How did the resurrection of Jesus change the disciples? How did the resurrection of Jesus change Thomas? What did it take for you to really believe in the resurrection of Jesus? How has the resurrection of Jesus changed you? [Eagle Christian Church](#)