

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

April 28, 2019
Second Sunday of Easter, Year C

The readings this week:

- Acts 5:27-32 ◦ Psalm 118:14-29
- Revelation 1:4-8 ◦ John 20:19-31



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

Touching Faith

Last week I heard a [story on NPR](#) about friendship. It referenced a study in which volunteers were exposed to mild (though the reporter who participated disagreed with that descriptive term "mild") electrical shocks while watching a video screen. When the screen displayed a red X in the corner, the volunteer's chances of getting a shock were one in five. If an O was displayed, no shock was forthcoming.

After the volunteer/reporter experienced the first shock, she exhibited symptoms of anxiety every time a red X appeared on the screen, tensing up for the next onset of pain. Anxiety levels rose whether the subject was watching the screen without being touched by another person, or while holding the hand of an unfamiliar lab tech.



But when the test subject's hand was held by a close friend who was present for the testing, her anxiety was much lower. It seems that the friend's presence

gave support and strength in such a way that the body's responses to stress were lowered.

In this week's gospel text, all the disciples were stressed to the limit after Jesus' death. When they gathered, Thomas chose not to join them. If you'd tested their anxiety levels, they'd be off the charts. Then they experienced Jesus in their presence, and felt shalom. Peace.

Thomas, though, heard about it and was unconvinced anything could give him peace. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

'A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side...'

Thomas' response? "My Lord and my God."

We are in trouble when we think faith is just a spiritual thing, an other-worldly exercise. Thomas, who wasn't at all sure he could have faith after Jesus' death, was invited to touch the open wounds of crucifixion, to be drawn into the physicality of death and life.

Many people experience this when they are ill, or living through some tremendous loss, or about to make a huge decision. The very presence of a person who loves them can make all the difference. That person can't take away the illness, bring back what was lost, or reduce the consequences of decision-making. But her presence makes it easier. His voice calms you. The touch of her hand gives you peace.

Touching, being touched by, someone we're close to changes us. It gives us strength, hope, spiritual courage. It makes us able to face trouble, to stand up to evil, to live bravely.

It gives us faith.

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1st Reading: Acts 5:27-32

The disciples had heard from Mary Magdalene that Jesus was alive and had sent them a message... and yet verse 19 finds them behind locked doors, afraid for their lives. What do you think was the emotional atmosphere in that locked room and why? If they already know Jesus is alive, why would they be afraid? In what ways might the fact that they all doubted Mary's story before Jesus appeared change the way we see Thomas' response? What do you make of Jesus' first words to them? Why do you think the narrative states that he immediately offers them physical proof of his resurrection? How might Thomas have felt at knowing Jesus appeared to the others when he was absent? How does Thomas' request compare to what the others have already seen? We weren't in the room when Jesus reappeared, so we can't know exactly how Jesus responded to Thomas. But what can we learn from the words Jesus uses; the way he acts when he first arrives; and the things he doesn't say? What do you make of Jesus' statement to Thomas: rebuke or promise? [Faith Element](#)

With a kindly countenance our good Lord looked in to his side, and he gazed with joy, and with his sweet regard he drew his creature's understanding into his side by the same wound; and there he revealed a fair and delectable place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved and will rest in peace and in love. And with that he brought to mind the dear and precious blood and water which he suffered to be shed for love. And in this sweet sight he showed his blessed heart split in two, and as he rejoiced he showed to my understanding a part of his blessed divinity, as much as was his will at that time, strengthening my poor soul to understand what can be said, that is the endless love which was without beginning and is and always shall be.
~ Julian of Norwich, via Suzanne Guthrie,
[At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 118:14-29

What is the Psalmist referring to when he mentions the stone which the builders refused to use? Which verse might indicate that the Psalmist believes in the resurrection? Give several examples of Thanksgiving Psalms. Are we happy warriors or glum warriors in the midst of our trials and difficulties? At the moment that the battle joins most intensely, do we face it with the sentiments presented in this Psalm? Is our faith weak or small in the day of battle? Does the Psalmist believe that God has already saved him or that God will save him? What do you believe? [Generations](#)

3rd Reading: Revelation 1:4-8

Who was John addressing in verse 4? What two main words did John offer the 7 churches in verse 4? How can you best define those two words without using a dictionary? Using verses 4 & 5, who are the three persons offering grace and peace? Describe a time in your life when you experienced a deep sense of God's grace and/or peace in your life. Make a list of things you learn about Jesus Christ in these verses and beside each write down its significance. Which description of Jesus that you listed for question 11 is most personally meaningful to you and why? How do John's descriptions of Jesus change the way you think of Jesus today? What do verses 7 & 8 reveal to you about the return of Jesus Christ to earth? [Monday Night Bible Study](#)



4th Reading: John 20:19-31

How do you think fear effects the church? How does it affect us? Have you ever been locked in by fear? What about doubt, like Thomas? In verse 19, John is very intentional in letting his readers know that the doors were locked. What do you think is the significance of this being added to the description of the events? Why do you think they may have had reason to fear? What else could have locked in them in their fear? Once in the room, the resurrected Jesus' first words to them are "Peace be with you." It can also be translated as 'shalom'. Describe what you think this peace would be that Jesus gives. Jesus breathes his divine breath on the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit. How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to risk, break barriers, and step out for Jesus? Where do your passions lie? What are your barriers? In what direction do you feel called, if any? How can you share the good news? [Little Trinity](#)

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