
Don't Miss the Meeting! Look for the Wounds

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler
Easter 2 – Year C

*"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails,
and place my finger in the mark of the nails,
and place my hand in his side,
I will not believe. —John 20:25*

It's Thomas. It is good old St. Thomas talking this morning. We know him most commonly as "Doubting Thomas." But there are two, two very different, ways to read his important comments from John, Chapter 20. Listen closely, and listen to which words I emphasize as I read verse 25:

"Unless I **see in his hands** the print of the nails,
and **place my finger** in the mark of the nails,
and **place my hand** in his side, I will **not believe**. (John 20.25)

That's the way we usually read those lines. That emphasis suggests that Thomas was a doubter, a sceptic, and that he wants empirical evidence of the risen Christ, maybe different from what the other disciples had. But listen to the way I read the same verse a second time:

"Unless **I** see in his hands the print of the nails,
and place **my** finger in the mark of the nails,
and place **my** hand in his side, **I** will not believe. (John 20.25)

Here's why I prefer this second emphasis: When Thomas spoke these famous words, all he wanted was the same experience, the same opportunity, that the other disciples had already had! Previously, on the evening of the first day of the week, Jesus had shown up; and he had already shown the other disciples his wounded body, his hands and his side. But, Thomas had not been there, at that first meeting!

When Thomas does show up, and hears the report of the other disciples, all he is saying is that he wants the same opportunity to see and feel Jesus! I do not believe Thomas is guilty of doubt or unbelief. As people on my staff know, the only thing I believe Thomas was guilty of was missing the first meeting.

So, I use St. Thomas as an object lesson at every staff meeting I lead. Don't miss the meeting! Please do not miss the meeting!

Or, you will end up sounding like good old Saint Thomas, "Unless **I** see in his hands the print of the nails, and place **my** finger in the mark of the nails, and place **my** hand in his side, **I** will not believe (John 20:25)." The other disciples, the other staff members, had made the first meeting, and they had already had opportunity to touch the wounded Christ! Don't miss the meeting!

Hundreds of years after the risen Christ appeared to the disciples, an old, unnamed, monk was deep in prayer, alone.

Suddenly, a glittering vision of majesty overwhelmed him. He looked up to see a splendid image of what looked like Jesus himself. This image seemed wise and all-knowing; the image answered great questions.. The image seemed perfect and pure.

But the wise monk had one request of this glittering image of Christ. The wise monk said, "Please, show me your hands." The image offered his hands.

"Away with you!" the wise monk exclaimed, "for your hands are smooth and unscarred. The hands of my Savior are pierced with holes and wounded. Away with you, you imposter!" Thus was the wise monk able to discern his Savior from the great deceivers of the world. Yes, those who show us Christ without the wounds are deceivers.

That monk is remembered as a wise and spiritual man; whereas, somehow, the apostle Thomas has become relegated to the "doubting" category. We often limit our interpretation of his story to the simplistic slogan, "it is okay to doubt." We say that the story of Thomas is here to re-assure us that it is okay to doubt.

Oh, but this story is deeper than that. The real power of the story of St. Thomas is that he asked for wounds, just as the great monk would years later. Authentic spirituality is not just the glory and the glitter; it is also the acknowledgment of pain and suffering.

We have entered a season of the church year when we proclaim resurrection. "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!" But how *do* we see Jesus Christ risen in the world? How *do* we believe in resurrection today, in our own time? Do we acknowledge Jesus by being talked into it through some intellectual argument?

No, I believe we meet Jesus today exactly in the way Thomas and the rest of the apostles saw him long ago. We meet Jesus by looking for his side and his hands. We meet the Christ by touching his wounds.

Many of the wounds we touch are in us who are the Church. That is as it should be, for we say of ourselves that we are the Body of Christ. Most of us have scars on our hands, and we have holes in our hearts. We are the lonely, the hurt, the abandoned and ostracized. We are the wounded Body of Christ. When we meet our wounds, we meet Christ.

And many of the wounds of this world are outside the supposed church community – among the poor, the sick, the homeless, outside our walls – among those about whom Jesus said, "Even as you do it to one of the least of these, when you clothe them, feed them, give them something to drink, you have done it to me." Jesus Christ, then, is among the wounded, the hurt and lost people of this world. That is where we would meet Christ. When we meet wounds, we meet Christ.

Meeting Christ, then, is not a simplistic intellectual and cerebral event, one that involves doubt and then faith, or evidence and then proof. In fact, it is sometimes easier to meet Christ if we *don't* expect rational answers to our intellectual questions. When we ask, "How can that wounded person be Christ?", we don't get an answer in words. The answer comes when we recognize in a great mystery that the wounds of that person are the same wounds Christ had. The answer comes when we touch those wounds and believe for ourselves. Like Thomas, we have to meet them for ourselves.

It takes courage to be like Thomas. Yes, courage to know our doubts and have the freedom to express them. But, also, courage to touch the wounds of Christ in today's world! Is Thomas, then, the apostle of doubt? I believe not. St. Thomas is the apostle of courage!

The resurrection of the wounded Jesus reveals something quite powerful about the Christian faith. Peace cannot come from someone who has not known violence. Forgiveness cannot come from someone who has not been betrayed. The Holy Spirit cannot come from someone who has not felt forsaken. Wholeness cannot come from someone who hasn't been wounded. But thanks be to God, our Lord does bear those wounds. In the words of Thomas, "Our Lord and Our God" is a betrayed Jesus, a scarred Savior, a wounded Christ, a pierced healer.

Today, a week later, as always, the resurrection is for wounded people. The resurrection is for doubting people. It is for people who need peace, people who need forgiveness, people who need courage. In other words, the resurrection is for us.

Yes, I say to the staff, to the Church, to the world: Don't miss the meeting! Look for the wounds. When we meet wounds, we have made the meeting! When we meet wounds, we meet Christ.

AMEN.

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