

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Community, Unity, Vulnerability"
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2nd Sunday of Easter

All of us have a need for relationship. None of us are designed to simply be alone. We all need some alone time as well, but relationship is hardwired into humanity that we should know one another. In fact, some psychologists have been so bold as to say that we don't really know reality until we have deep relationships with others. It is in relationship with others that we show our faults, our strengths, our curiosity and our kindness, or the lack thereof.

Jesus, during his earthly ministry, developed a small group of followers. This small group disbanded when Jesus died, with the exception of some of the women and John. Within a week, however, they banded together again, probably because they knew how much they needed each other. They locked themselves in a room, for fear of being identified with Jesus, who had been tortured to death in the humiliation of the cross. It was into that locked room that the Lord appeared to them. Some of our hearts are locked as well, out of fear and for other reasons, but I pray you and I might have the same experience of Jesus showing up when we least expect it.

Now that he was there, it was the beginning of the new community of the risen Lord. Up until now everyone had their ideas about how Jesus was going to establish a political kingdom. Now they understood he had a different idea. That idea had included people from every social, economic, racial, educational and other diversity you can think of, and brought them together into one community. They helped each other in practical ways. They listened to eyewitness accounts of the risen Lord. They even sold their financial security to help those in deep poverty. The church was born as a practical community of caring and listening. You could say that the Acts 4:32-35 community simply cared for one another and took up offerings to help each other. This was their worship, and their unity.

The other Scripture passage about unity was the very brief Psalm 133. There we find a song of praise for the unity there is in the worshipping community. The unity God gives is something like the anointing oil that goes over the High Priest's head and onto his shoulders and clothing. The picture is that of abundance and of the blessing of God not only touching the one person who is receiving it but also everyone else around. There is so

much blessing that it pours off him or her onto others around them. The blessing is like heavy dew that nourishes the crops and the grasses for the animals. It is like the grace of God from heaven that comes down and does more than we ever expected, which is what Easter is all about. This is not to say that we never have disagreements. This is to say that our unity in light of Jesus' resurrection is greater than any disagreement or doubt.

And flowing from the community and unity of what Jesus did for us, that we receive as a gift of grace, we cannot earn it, comes vulnerability. We see this is the first chapter of John's first letter. He simply says that what the disciples experienced with their five senses is what they told and wrote down for others. And because of that community and unity, they could be honest about their doubts and sins. This is the context for that verse that I constantly quote in our prayer of confession. The two verses together are: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1: 8 – 9)

All of us sin against God and one another. We all have all kinds of selfishness, problems, issues, challenges and outright rebellion against God. If we think this is not the case, then we need to ask someone close to us, if we are courageous enough to do so. So John is bold enough to say that we are in denial if we think we are better than we actually are. On the other hand, once we get to this place of admitting where we truly are, then grace has a chance to flow into our lives. In fact, it is the place where we know we are truly loved and have experienced the love of God. This is the place where you know your badness, where you know you do not deserve either grace or love. It is the place where the Lord and others can speak grace and mercy, love and forgiveness into us. But we need to admit our faults and sins. That takes vulnerability, and vulnerability takes courage.

Where does our courage come from? I don't believe it comes from ourselves but from God and significant others. This is not about self-confidence or self-help. When you have someone who will listen to you and not condemn you, but simply listen and care for you; that person is the greatest treasure in your life, whether a spouse or friend or family member, or co-worker, whoever it is. Maybe it is a small group.

Thus we have the community of Jesus, the unity of his resurrection community and the vulnerability that flows in a safe place sets the stage for

St. Thomas. We don't know what Thomas would have said, had he been in the room the first time the Lord appeared. We just don't know. We don't know why he was out of the room. Maybe he wasn't getting along with some of Jesus' followers. We can guess, but we don't know.

We do know that when he heard the reports of the others, he was unconvinced. We also know that he felt safe enough amongst the other believers to tell them how he truly felt. This is why I say the community and unity of Jesus' resurrection family allows this level of vulnerability.

Some of you have confided in me and others here that you don't believe all the essentials of the Christian faith, that you have a hard time accepting what is written in the Scriptures. We call this "doubts." And some call Thomas a doubter, he is famous or infamous as "doubting Thomas." We all have doubts of some kind. Yet I still prefer to see it as an exploration of what we truly believe. Some of us continue to explore and need further evidence and proof, as Thomas did.

May I suggest that you bring before God what you think you need. Thomas needed the touch, although we don't really know if he actually put his hands and fingers in the wounds of the Lord. We do know he worships Jesus, and Jesus gives an eternal blessing on all those who do not have the privilege that Thomas had in seeing and touching the Lord.

So my only advice to those who deeply relate to Thomas' wanting more evidence, more than just the words of others is to simply tell the Lord what you would like to experience. God doesn't always give us the dramatic experience we may look for, but it is good to place before God our expectations and ambitions. And may I be so bold as to say, just as I say to those who are engaged, or have a girlfriend/boyfriend for years, "don't be content to always keep your options open," but rather be drawn into that commitment to Christ, to that intimate place with Jesus that draws you and us into worship. That is the place where we trust Jesus like never before and completely give ourselves to the Author of Life. That is the place of blessing, where the oil of life is flowing and the dew from heaven is all over the place. This week, as much or more than any other we can say, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

This isn't about our holiness. It isn't about our goodness, but about the Lord's. And it is about our willingness to cooperate with truth and reality, a

truth and reality beyond that which we expect. Some try to deal with the supernatural and the miraculous as merely metaphors or parables. So it is not Jesus actually coming to life and walking through doors because of some new physics at work in the new resurrection body. Rather it is the power of the story that changes us on the inside. Now it is true that the story has power, but it is also true that what we read actually happened. As we read last week, if Christ didn't rise, then our trust in God is in vain and we are truly to be pitied.

But thankfully, we don't have to fear our mortality, our death, nor the death of our loved ones, because Jesus has gone somewhere no one else has ever gone, to death and back to life, as the Life Giver himself. And if we don't have to fear death, we don't have to fear those parts of our lives that continue to keep us in bondage and immaturity.

With the help of God's community, with the strength of a unity that flows from what Jesus did for us, we can have the strength to be weak and grow into all that God has for us.

Let us pray.