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2 Easter Year B, April 7, 2024  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Cleveland Heights, Ohio)  
John 20:19-31

### A “Low Sunday” Farwell

In the Church, we often refer to this day, the Second Sunday of Easter, as “Low Sunday.” That’s because it feels “low” compared to the pomp and circumstance of last Sunday. The trumpets are gone, the lilies have wilted, and historically attendance plummets. But here we are, bucking the trend! Our fellowship is still very much alive with Easter joy! Our Alleluias still resound with jubilant intensity! I, for one, love that my final Sunday at St. Paul’s falls on this not-so-low “Low Sunday,” because each and every year on this day, we hear one of the most profound passages in all of John’s Gospel: the story of so-called “Doubting Thomas.”

Poor Thomas – bless his heart – has forever been typecast as a skeptic. [Indeed, if you ask Microsoft Word to offer a synonym for skeptic, “Doubting Thomas” is at the top of the list!] But this characterization of Thomas is grossly unfair, and it obscures the true meaning of this passage. While Thomas may have been slower than his brethren to embrace the resurrection, he didn’t ask for anything more than they received. The other disciples believed because they beheld the risen Christ with their own eyes. Thomas simply wanted the same opportunity.

Yes, far too often, Thomas is criticized for wanting proof of the resurrection. But can we blame Thomas for seeking evidence that a dead man had come back to life?! That’s not the remarkable part of this story. What’s remarkable about this story is how urgently the risen Christ responds to Thomas’ desire. What’s remarkable is that Jesus refuses to leave Thomas mired in his doubt and longing. This story portrays the risen Christ who stops at nothing – who literally walks through doors locked from fear – to encounter those who long

to see him. Thomas' story gives us hope that Christ will come to us even, and perhaps especially, in our doubt and disbelief.

But let's be clear. Thomas did not long to simply *see* the risen Jesus. His criterion for belief was more specific than that. We know from last week's Gospel that simply seeing the risen Jesus doesn't necessarily lead to belief, or even recognition for that matter. You'll recall that when Mary Magdalene first encountered the risen Christ on Easter morning, she mistook him for the gardener. Listen again to Thomas' words: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands...I will not believe." For Thomas to come to faith, he needs to see signs of Jesus' wounds. Thomas wants to know that the Jesus who has been raised is the Jesus who suffered. That the Jesus who escaped the tomb, is the Jesus who declared victory from the cross. Upon seeing the "mark of the nails in [Jesus]' hands," Thomas can finally offer his confession of faith. Once he knows that the One who was pierced is also the One who is risen, Thomas can exclaim with confidence, "My Lord and my God!"

Friends, don't miss the true message at the heart of this story: the resurrection did not erase the signs of Jesus' suffering. And, in fact, his wounds – we might say, his scars – are the very place he was made recognizable. The very place he came into focus for those who longed to see him. This is good news for us who bear our own wounds and scars, and who live in a wounded world. The gospel tells us that our wounds are not defects. That our wounds are not something to hide. That we need not be ashamed of our scars. This Easter gospel suggests that our wounds are so central to our identity, that they will be visible in our glorified body when we are raised to new life, just as they were visible in Jesus' body.

Coming as it does on my last Sunday as your priest, this passage renews my gratitude for my ministry here. For the privilege of tending to your spiritual wounds. The wounds of regret. The wounds of loneliness. The wounds of grief. To be sure, I have found great joy in

teaching, preaching the Gospel, and in administering the sacraments. But I found the greatest joy of all in being your pastor. So, thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for entrusting me with this sacred responsibility.

I discerned my call to this ministry – to pastoral ministry – because my most profound encounters with the risen Christ have occurred in my own woundedness. In the midst of fears and anxieties of not being enough. In the agony of physical pain from multiple spinal surgeries. In the throes of addiction, when I found myself on the brink of despair. In these moments when my faith was hanging by a thread. It was in these places that I encountered the risen Christ breathing peace into my life. Not a peace that nullifies pain or eradicates fear, but a peace that assures me of his abiding presence. A peace that says, I will not abandon you. I will heal your wounds. I will give you new life.

My prayer is that each of you might know this peace. That the peace of Christ, that passes all understanding, might abide with you, and all those you love, this day and always. As you continue to walk faithfully as the body of Christ at St. Paul's, as you entrust new pastors to preach, teach, and tend to your wounds, may you come more and more to believe in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. And through believing, may you have life in his name. Eternal, abundant, overflowing, grace-filled life. Amen.