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Text: John 20:19-31

April 11, 2010
Easter 2

DOUBT AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

We have just celebrated Easter. Easter truly is the Greatest Day of all. Easter is the Day of Resurrection, the Day when God raised Jesus from the dead. I love Easter. It is thrilling to hear the story of Christ's resurrection, to sing the Easter hymns, to be surrounded by lots of other Christians. It is exciting to be a Christian on Easter.

The rest of the time, though, it is not so easy. Most of us struggle with our faith and find it hard at times to have the kind of faith we know God wants us to have.

There is plenty to eat away at our faith, plenty that causes doubts, plenty that leads us to waver. Perhaps it is the economy. Perhaps it is the breakup of a marriage. Perhaps it is a pain that won't go away. Perhaps it is an unrelenting illness. Perhaps it is seeing a child who is paralyzed, unable to walk or run or play with other children. Perhaps it is unanswered prayer. Things like these can cause us to struggle with faith.

Or perhaps it is not anything in particular, just living in today's world. I have been told that if a frog is placed in a pan of hot water it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water which is then gradually heated, the frog will calmly remain until the heat kills it. I wonder if that is what is happening to many of us. We are so accustomed to living in a secular society, where God is pushed aside and relegated to the side lines of life, that we don't even notice what it is doing to our faith, that our faith is slowly being suffocated and choked to death.

No wonder it is so tough to have faith. No wonder many of us are skeptical and plagued with doubts. Just like Thomas.

Thomas was one of the disciples of Jesus. He was there when Jesus was arrested. He watched as Jesus was nailed to the cross. He witnessed his death and burial. So when he heard that Jesus was alive, he was skeptical. He probably wanted to believe. He probably was hoping that Jesus really was alive. But he was skeptical. Like so many of us, he had doubts. Thomas is our sort of guy. A guy for whom faith does not come easy.

Now, let's go to the story we heard today in the reading from the Gospel of John. Thomas wasn't with the disciples the first time Jesus came and spent time with them. The rest of the disciples saw Jesus, saw that he was alive. It was an Easter experience for them. They rejoiced and got really excited.

Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And then he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

And you know what? The disciples listened to Jesus and they understood what he told them to do, that they were to reach out to people. And they noticed that Thomas was absent and they went and talked with him. "We have seen the Lord," they told Thomas. And I am sure they encouraged Thomas to meet with them the following Sunday.

The disciples were learning to be the church. They were beginning to understand what it means to be the Body of Christ - or a kingdom of priests, as the reading today from Revelation put it. They were beginning to understand that "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" as the Apostle Paul would later say in a letter to the Corinthians. And so if one person was struggling with faith, they were all affected. So they went to Thomas. They reached out to him. They cared for him.

And Thomas responded to that care. Their love and concern drew him back. And so he was there the following Sunday when Jesus came and he saw the Lord, he saw his wounds, he saw that he was alive, and his faith was restored. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaimed.

There are some important lessons for us to learn from this story. First, we are the Body of Christ, a kingdom of priests, and Christ sends us out to those who are hurting. Second, we are reminded that we all struggle at times with faith at times, and when we do, we need the rest of the Body of Christ to reach out to us and care for us. Third, we learn that Christ works through us to help people who are hurting, just as Christ worked through the disciples to help Thomas. Fourth, Christ is present when we gather together and Christ can restore our faith.

It happens! Doubts are erased and faith is strengthened. Through the Word of God and through the Meal we share, Christ shows us his wounds, the marks of the cross, and he shows us that he is alive, and he gives us peace, and he fills us with his Spirit, and he helps us to believe and he gets us excited about what God is doing in the world and he invites us to be part of this work.

Listen to what Jesus says. These words are for you. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Do you know someone who is hurting? Do you know someone who is struggling with faith? Jesus sends you to that person. Go, care for that person. Encourage that person to come and experience Christ as we meet together.

This is what the Body of Christ does! This is one of the ways the resurrection of Jesus makes a real difference in the lives of people!