

April 7, 2024
The Second Sunday in Easter
St. Stephen's, Catlett
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Acts 4:32-35
Psalm 133
1 John 1:1-2:2
John 20:19-31

I know we can't approach the second Sunday in Easter without talking about Thomas, so here's my take: good old Thomas really took one for the team today. He pretty much took the blame for what everyone else had always been doing. I say that because the word we most often associate with Thomas – doubt – does not appear in the Greek of today's Gospel. Instead, the word John uses is *απιστος* (*apistos*, *a-pistos*), where *pistos* is often translated as faith, but more accurately means trust, and that prefix “a” negates the word). Thomas didn't just doubt: he had no faith; he had no trust. But come on, neither did anyone else! Peter and the Beloved Disciple just went home after looking in the empty tomb; Mary Magdalene kept insisting that someone stole the body, and then when she finally realized (and believed) what was happening, no one believed her. If the disciples had believed her, would they still be locked away in the upper room “for fear of the Jews?” Thomas simply gave voice to everyone else's nonbelief. And it's not just that they didn't believe Mary; they didn't believe Jesus Himself, Who had told them maybe a thousand times that He would be killed and would be raised from the dead in three days.

But by giving voice to that lack of faith, that lack of trust, Thomas gives voice to us, which is why I say he took one for the team. He said what no one else would. Jesus is well aware of everyone's lack of faith, of trust, and certainly of understanding. Death didn't erase His memory; how could He forget that His disciples all scattered and hid on the night of His arrest? How Peter denied knowing Him three times. In response, three times Jesus says to those same disciples, locked away in continuing fear, “Shalom.” Shalom means “peace,” but peace at that time came in three different flavors: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. The Roman peace (*pax*) referred to a lack of strife, usually civil; Greek peace, *ειρηνη* (*eirene*) referred more to inner tranquility or serenity; and Hebrew peace, Shalom, indicated that the relationships between people were good. To wish someone Shalom is to wish someone well and to say that all past differences – and sins – are forgiven. Three times Jesus extends His Shalom to His disciples, in spite of their communal and individual lack of faith.

John tells us that he wrote all of this down so that we – you and I – would “come to believe,” which is to say, come to *pistos*, to faith and trust (20:31). Coming to believe, for the disciples, was a process; it took a while, and at every step Jesus extended His Shalom. I wonder how many of us echo the words of the poor guy whose son was possessed: when Jesus told the father to believe, he cried out, “Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). *Pistos*, whether we call it faith, belief, or trust, does not come easily to us. When we're not in possession of it, we suffer from *a-pistos*, the same as Thomas. Does that mean we doubt? I doubt it. It means that our trust in what God can do in our lives is incomplete. John wrote in his Gospel, and in his first letter that we also hear today, that he is writing all of this stuff down so that you and I might come to trust, might come to build up our trust in the God Who gives us life, Who redeems our lives from the grave, and Who continually blesses and sanctifies us with the gift of His Shalom every time we come into His presence.

We'll be in Eastertide for fifty days, and Easter is all about new life. We can't recognize, much less embrace, that new life if we don't believe in it, if we don't anticipate it, and most of all, if we don't trust God to bring it to us. John wrote all of these words so that you and I might come to trust the promise.