Second Sunday of Easter, Year C
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Inviting Our Doubts and Wounds

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

This past Tuesday night, a visitor arrived on my front porch. A friend from my college freshman dorm who I had not seen or talked to in over two years was stopping through Boston on a road trip and decided to visit me. As we sat down for dinner and started talking about our lives, I noticed that something was different about her. She was relaxed and radiant in a way that I had not encountered before. As our conversation went on, I stopped her at one point and mentioned how happy she seems to be right now. And from there, she opened up about the difficult struggles she faced when we were in college together.

As we talked and eventually started to finish up with dinner, she told me, "I wouldn't want to do it again, but I am thankful for that time in my life to face those challenges and overcome them. And I carry them with me today as I continue to grow through them."

In our third reading today from the gospel of John, we encounter Christ who is resurrected yet also <u>still</u> the crucified Christ. The disciples recognize Jesus once he shows them the scars on his hands and in his side. It says something that Jesus reveals himself to them in that way,

by displaying his scars to his followers and then later inviting Thomas to embrace those very scars.

Every day, I witness a world where there's so much pressure to be put together, where it's often not socially acceptable to bring our full selves to a space or lay down the scars or difficulties that we're carrying with us, unless we're in the presence of very trusted individuals. When I meet someone who is willing to reveal his or her scars, there is an invitation into shared humanity and into fully understanding another person. We are all journeying together in that humanity and there's great blessing every time we can realize that. Even if we've worked through a lot and feel healthy or healed in a sense, our scars continue to be part of us and the ways we grow.

Fr. Richard Rohr says,

> *The place of the wound is the place of the healing. The place of the break is the place of the greatest strength. That is why Jesus himself, even in his resurrected body, reappears with the wounds still in his hands, in his side, in his feet. They do not disappear as you might expect. Many times in our lives we shy away from our wounds, as if they embarrass us. We want to hide them, cover them up, pretend they are not there and avoid any discussion associated with our wounds. Yet, the wounds of our lives are our places of strength. The wounds of our lives are the doorways to God.*

In the gospel today, we are also shown by Thomas that doubt is can be a doorway to God. We could focus on Jesus' words: "Blessed are those who have not yet seen and yet come to believe" and talk about how much of a lesson that is on not doubting him. But the reality is that Jesus showed up to Thomas because that is what Thomas needed to believe.

Too often we equate certainty with faith. There are assumptions made that those who have deep spiritual lives have all the answers, when that's far from the truth. Often people will leave faith when they encounter doubt. I think of the first time I practiced contemplative prayer. I was lost and barely centered in that sacred space. I doubted my connection with God and sat restlessly waiting for the time to wrap up. I thought that those around me knew the right way to do it. I perceived that they had the answer, the certainty of God in the experience. Yet, later, while talking to my teacher, I learned that even he struggles to find God and answers during his practice.

In *New Seeds of Contemplation,* Thomas Merton writes of the ways that faith and doubt both play their role in the spiritual life:

> *Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial "doubt." This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious 'faith' of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion.*

As a teenager, I remember being weirded out when my minister encouraged us to question our faith. He told us that it was with those questions that we would be given opportunity to continue to build a relationship with God, even if the form of that relationship looked different from what it did before.

Christian belief is about building and existing in a relationship with Jesus. It's not about knowing it all or being perfectly put together. Thomas and the other disciples show us that. They are far from perfect and still reaching toward believing. Yet, Jesus handpicked these beautifully flawed individuals to follow him.

It was a challenge for them at times living into that relationship with God. In the reading from Acts today, Peter and the apostles take serious risks in obeying God over other human authority and sharing the story of Christ's resurrection. There may certainly be scars, wounds, or even alienation that come from that experience. Yet, it's what God is calling them to do and they trust in God because the crucifixion wasn't the end of the story.

We are called to bring it all to God. To bring our doubts and certainties. To bring our questions and any answers we may have begun to receive. To bring our wounds as places of healing. We can bring all these things to God and acknowledge that they will continue to stay with us, even as we are changed through them. The Christ that is here with us today is resurrected yet still crucified and we can continue to celebrate that miracle with wonder this Easter Season. *Amen.*