“What does it take?”

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John 20:19-31

April 16, 2023 Second Sunday of Easter

***John 20:19-31***

***When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”***

***24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”***

***26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”***

***30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and*** ***that through believing you may have life in his name.***

For most of us, our senses are our primary means of interacting with the world. We make all kinds of judgments and decisions based on the information we get from our senses. Our neurological systems have this figured out for us, constantly monitoring information and making adjustments. It’s why we learned how to walk, how we judge safety before we reach out and touch a stove, why we move away from the speakers at a rock concert, and why we don’t look at the sun. Information that we get from our senses is more trustworthy than information we get by other means.

Thomas knew this well. While this scripture text today is often referred to as the doubting Thomas text, Thomas was not the only person in that position. Thomas was just one of many biblical characters who we have read about who have looked to their senses for further information. Thomas wanted to *touch*. Mary didn’t believe until she *heard*. The other disciples didn’t believe Mary’s news until they *saw*. We should also remember the story of Lazarus and the *smell* of the tomb. The only sense missing is *taste*, but even that is present in all of the feeding present in scripture. It’s not unusual for us to use our senses to confirm or deny something. That our human senses are at work in the biblical accounts is what it means to have an embodied experiential faith. Having an embodied faith, recognizing the embodiment of God in the person of Jesus is kind of the whole point.

Hidden away in an upper room for fear of being found by the same authorities who killed Jesus, the disciples are not even a full day distant from discovering for themselves that the tomb where Jesus lay was empty. Into this locked room appears Jesus. Speaking first in assurance, “Peace be with you.” Jesus then showed the disciples his hands and his side. Just as Mary first heard Jesus’ voice calling her name and then saw Jesus, the disciples too first hear Jesus offer them peace and then see the wounds in Jesus’ body. By the time Thomas arrives on the scene he too needs more than just hearing the news, to believe the news.

Why should you and I be any different?

Today is known as Cannon Ball Sunday, Low Sunday, Throw Away Sunday, Holy Humor Sunday, a-good-day-to-do-anything-unusual-in-Church Sunday. It’s also known as the second Sunday of Easter. While we hopefully don’t share the same trembling fear and confusion of the disciples in that upper room, we too are in the place just after the events have happened. We have lived in this perpetual Sunday-after-Easter place for over 2,000 years. Every Sunday is the one after the Resurrection.

It makes sense then that we would need more than just the words of others to hold on to the import and power of our faith. Tradition – words of others over time – is a great way to hold on to a sense of faith. But before there was tradition, there was Jesus himself. The Jesus that appeared, the risen Jesus, still had his wounds. The risen Christ still bears the scars of the embodied life that he lived.

It's the scars that carry the weight of truth. We don’t have faith in Christ only because we have *heard* the Good News, we have faith in Christ also because we have *touched* the wounds and *seen* the scars. The scars we carry ourselves, and the scars we recognize in others, are the visible signs of the invisible. We see Christ in others when we recognize the wounds we carry.

Scars are visible and invisible. They are remnants of a wound. People tend to hide scars because they are an interruption to something otherwise perfect. A scar announces that we were vulnerable once. That something happened that is not completely gone.

I have one scars that I can think of that is so old it’s barely visible on my hand anymore. That one was tiny even when it was new. I was in high school chemistry, and something heating in a small dish splashed and landed on my hand. In an instant it burned, blistered and peeled. I remember that more than any feeling of worry or hurt, I was most astonished by how quickly the whole burn-blister-peel events happened! It’s a story I still tell! That kind of scar is like wearing a memory on the outside. What if we all wore photographs taped to ourselves.

When we think of all the scars we might have, maybe we remember tragic things like accidents, fights, surgeries or physical harm that has come our way. Then there are the scars that are invisible – from important relationships that have marked us, illnesses that we live with, harm we have caused others, to the weight of a terrible grief.

I think of this friend I have in Chicago, who lives with bipolar disorder. Some people with bipolar disorder use the semi-colon as a symbol of sorts. Rather than a period that marks the end, a semi-colon only marks a pause. A semi-colon as a symbol refers to not letting ending look too tempting. Don’t take your life – take a pause. It is used as a message of affirmation and solidarity with those who have dealt with suicide, depression, addiction, and other mental health issues. Not a fan of tattoos, or wearing her heart on her sleeve or talking about herself at all, she nevertheless decided to get a tattoo of a semi-colon. A tattoo, an intentional mark, an intentional scar, an intentional interruption of the skin that says something about her invisible wound, and the same wound of so many. What courage to *add* a scar, *add* a mark, that tells a story. Not a story of a broken dysfunctional vulnerable person who wants attention or pity. That tattoo tells the story of a courageous heroic mighty powerful act of *life*. A story that says, “Not today!” to the enemy.

Life over death, for her and others. Life over death for Jesus. What if Thomas seeing Jesus’ wounds isn’t a message about doubting but rather, is a message that says, “If death didn’t end Jesus, neither will ‘this’ end you.” These real scars remain but I live. Believing in Jesus does not mean there will not be pain or sorrow or loss. These things are written that you may continue believing…that *through believing* you may have *life in his name*. Belief in itself is not the end goal. It is through the belief in the power of Jesus that we then come to have a life in his name. That is the goal, because a life in the name of Christ opens the possibility for one to become a partner with Christ in the work of God in the world.

I have been spending the last two weeks looking everywhere for a printed or electronic version of my Statement of Faith. I wrote it about 25 years ago. It’s about a page long. I can’t re-create it from memory because the only thing I remember is that the first line is “I belong to God.” Maybe that’s all it needs to say, and I can just forget the rest of the page. A life in the name of Christ means to me that when things occur in my life, I can consider those things in light of belonging to God. I can look to the life of Christ for examples, context, perspective, insight about those things. When I do that, I can find a depth of my humanity far beyond the five senses we all share, that allows for a wider view of all of humanity.

As we experience the Sunday after Easter, over and over and over again, remember even the tragedy of the cross and the wounds and scars of life were not enough to keep Jesus down.

Let us pray.