

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer.”

Doubting Thomas

2nd Sunday of Easter – Year B

John 20:19-31

Guest preacher: The Rev. Sandy Williams

When I was a child, like most children, I was curious about the world. I asked, “What do ants taste like?” and “What happens when I mix this with this?” And except for that time I mixed the wrong two things together, the adults in my life were tolerant, condoning and even encouraging of my curiosity.

As a child I was also VERY curious about God. I was fascinated by the age old question, “If God is all powerful, can HE create a stone that even He can’t lift?”. And, more poignantly, “Why can’t my cat, Jackie, go to heaven?” (Quite franking, if my beloved pet wasn’t going there, I didn’t want to be there) When I voiced these questions and concerns in Church, the reaction of the adults around me was different. They shook their heads and said, “Oh, Sandy. Just believe what the Church tells you. You must have faith. Don’t be a Doubting Thomas.” I felt chastised for my questioning. It seemed that the only way to develop FAITH was to set aside my curiosity, my skepticism and, indeed, my intellect. Apparently the path to FAITH involved naivety, a sort of “blind faith”. I found this discomfiting because this was simply not in my nature.

As I became adult, my questions about God became more ardent, more personal, and much more angry. Why did a merciful God allow my first born son to be born so critically ill? Why did an all powerful God allow my friends Bruce, then Carl, then Brian, then John, then Thomas to die of AIDS, all of them gifted young men who would have contributed so much to God’s world. At times I worried that my inability to let go of these questions was making me a bad Christian.

Eventually, however, I discovered that the story of Doubting Thomas, a story which was thrown at me as a cautionary tale as a child, provided both insight and comfort. Thomas, like me, was a questioner and a skeptic. And, at the moment this Gospel story begins, I imagine Thomas was upset, scared and probably angry. The events of the past few days were terrifying for him. I'm sure Jesus' death on the cross was not the outcome that Thomas had envisioned. So when other disciples came to him and said, "We have seen the Lord!", Thomas' response is, "Yeah, right.... Sorry, but I want proof." Thomas was unwilling to believe something just because someone else said it was true.

The bible is actually full of questioning, skeptical and angry people. The patriarch Jacob wrestled with an angel of the Lord. The matriarch, Sarah, laughed at God. The prophet, Jonah, was so angry with God, he stomped off into the desert in a suicidal rage.

Jesus, himself, upon the cross cried out, "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

And what is God's response to all of this?

Jacob won the wrestling match and God gave him the blessing he demanded. And Sarah? In response to her disrespect, God gave her a much longed-for baby. And Jonah? God caused a large plant to grow over Jonah to give him shade and allow him to cool off. Then God went to Jonah and has a long talk with him, explaining everything.

And while I do find it strange that God doesn't seem to show up in his own son's last hours, the bottom line is this: It is GOD -- not the Romans, not the Jewish leaders, and not the Mob -- It is God who has the last word in the crucifixion story.

In today's Gospel lesson people, to my mind, hyper focus, on the fact that Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe." In fact they throw these words at children to stop them from asking perfectly reasonable questions. I have met Godly people who have

a much easier time accepting matters of faith than I do. And I agree – they are indeed blessed.

But the bottom line to this Gospel story is this: Thomas demanded proof. AND HE GOT IT.

Curiously, Thomas doesn't seem to take up Jesus' offer to touch his wounded body. Instead, Thomas proclaims, "My Lord and my God!" In doing this, according to John's Gospel, Thomas is the first of the followers to recognize the absolute divinity of the risen Jesus. Thomas' skepticism and demand for proof resulted in knowledge that no one else had yet had, and a statement of faith that would soon be heard around the world.

Good for Thomas for not accepting something just because someone else told him it was true.

My curiosity about the world has taught me many things, among them that ants taste slightly sour and you need to be very, VERY careful with you mix things together.

Likewise, my curiosity about God has taught me many things:

I now know that an all powerful God can indeed create a stone even God is unable to lift. But that's a silly exercise and she has much more important things to attend to.

I now know that my beloved childhood cat, Jackie, will meet me in heaven, not because I secretly baptized her when I was nine years old, but because God loves us both.

I don't fully understand why my oldest son was born so critically ill. But I saw God's merciful hand 28 years later, when that same now strong, healthy, intelligent adult son of mine sat by his critically ill premature baby's incubator and used his own birth story to comfort himself and those around him.

And I still don't understand why my friends died of AIDS. If I had all of God's power, I would have stopped that horrible epidemic. But my

conversations with God about this have grown much less angry over the years. I have faith that I will someday understand it all.

So the next time a child comes to you and asks something like, "Why did God create mosquitoes?" please don't say, "To annoy you as much as you are annoying me by asking questions about God that I can't answer!" Instead say, "I don't know. Why don't you go ask God about that. And if God gives you an answer, please come and tell me what it is."

AMEN