

Easter 2B

April 11, 2010

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 5:27-32 Peter tells the Sanhedrin that he must preach Jesus Christ

Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8 John announces 'peace to you', and describes the grandeur of Christ

John 20:19-31 Jesus addresses Thomas' doubts, sent them out, empowered them

You might have noticed that I approach things showing lots of signs of the 35 years I spent in electrical engineering. Actually, there were signs of this kind of behavior within me forever. It is kind of a joke in the family. When we decided to go canoeing through some of the Chain of Lakes in the Adirondack Mountains in northern New York, the first thing I did was to buy a Boy Scout merit badge book on canoeing. I needed to know the 'right' way to paddle and portage the canoe. When Ruth and I decided to bowl, I bought a book first. When I decided to build my own high end stereo speakers, I brought home from the library every book they had on closed box speaker design. The list goes on for most things I do. I doubt my ability to do these things, so I ask questions, get things settled, and then I feel confident to tackle the job with passion. (It didn't work with golf.)

The same thing was happening on this day, one week after Easter, in a locked room with the disciples watching as Thomas questioned Jesus' resurrection. Let's take a closer look.

A week earlier, at the Last Supper, Jesus had charged his followers to carry forward the ministry he had begun. Now that Jesus was dead, what should they do?

As they huddled together on the evening of Easter Day, I can imagine their discussion. Why had they so impetuously dropped everything to follow Jesus in the first place? Why hadn't the "Kingdom come" in the way they had hoped? Could the whole Jesus thing have been some kind of temporary insanity? Why on earth had they left their families? Why had they walked away from good businesses and left their lifelong friends? For this? To huddle together as faithless fugitives?

What should they do next? Is there still a reason to commit to this brand of service called servanthood, out of a sense of respect to their former teacher? The answer is an

emphatic NO, and the exchange between Jesus and Thomas holds the answer that all of the disciples were soon to receive.

Thomas was not the only follower to doubt that Jesus was resurrected. Mary Magdalene doubted that she saw Jesus, assuming it was only the gardener. Later the eleven rejected Mary's eye witness account of seeing Jesus alive. Each of them only finally believed when Jesus physically appeared to them. So Thomas was not at all unique to doubt that Jesus was alive again. Doubt is logical; it is even necessary; so that no one will fall victim to an impersonator. This is serious stuff!

Have you ever wondered why Thomas was not in the upper room with the other disciples? Maybe he needed time away from the rest to gather his thoughts. Maybe he felt his zeal cooled off with Jesus gone. Maybe his motivation to go and 'do likewise' as Jesus had commanded seemed pointless and too difficult. Maybe at the same time his faith was tugging at him, saying that this was work he could not just put down and walk away from. So like us lots of times, maybe Thomas had this mixed bag of feelings about being incomplete without God, but swamped with the reality of life, too overwhelmed to figure out what to do.

Thomas was about to learn that God does not settle for empty, cold, impassionate followers, motivated by a lukewarm faith.

It just might be that the appearance of Jesus was less about making Thomas into a believer, and more about filling him to overflowing with hope and passion for the work of being an apostle (which literally means to be a messenger). I think Jesus was telling Thomas to go and do his mission with passion, zeal, and joy, because that is the only way agape love will reign in this world. The message Thomas should carry, all the disciples should carry, and you and I should carry, needs to come from a place of passion for our Lord Jesus Christ, not out of a cold sense of obligation. Jesus does not want cold, dispassionate service just because he commanded it. He does not want lukewarm faith. He wants passionate believers who love to serve and cannot wait to share what this new life is like that Jesus gives those who believe.

Thomas wasn't stubborn in his disbelief; he needed reason to believe. And when he was given proof, he immediately, without even touching Jesus' hands and side, proclaimed him not only to be really there, but to be God. That was passion for Christ! Thomas had

to read the manual, settle his doubts, and be ready to tackle the job of apostle with passion.

The Good News was not just the Good News that Jesus was God the Son; this was Good News for Thomas personally, and for you and me, personally. Jesus came to Thomas personally, in physical form; and now that he is ascended, he is able to come to all of us personally, in the form of his Holy Spirit. God is with us, there is no mistake. And this God is personal. He cares about your faith, and wants to settle doubts. But he also will not negotiate the rule of free will. And so he waits for you to invite him into your life, and to invite him into your day, and invite him into every issue and worry and celebration that you encounter in life.

We have relived Jesus' death and resurrection. We have received his Holy Spirit in our baptism. We have been commissioned to NOT keep our faith to ourselves, or how it makes us feel, or how it empowers us to live a new kind of life in this crazy world.

As I reflect on today's lessons, I see the power that came into each disciple's ministry. I am reminded that this is not just an intellectual consent that there is a god. It is also about carrying a passion for God.

I think Jesus is looking for followers like Thomas, and like the people at our work day two weeks ago, and the people who bring socks and clothing and food and contributions that support people in this neighborhood, this city, the Sudan and Kenya, and around the world. Heaven celebrates the passion we hold for our Lord Jesus Christ, and that this passion fuels what we do here.

May you have the courage of Thomas to take your doubts directly to Jesus; to give your Lord the opportunity to settle those doubts; and then to recognize Him being right with you, offering to show you the wounds he has endured for you; and for you to believe; and serve with passion.

Amen.