

To Be the Hands and Feet of Jesus in the World Today

By: Rachel Helton

April 7, 2024. Today, Rachel Helton's message is on Doubting Thomas, and how the resurrected Jesus meets him and us where we need him most.

Readings: [Acts 4:32-35](#), [Psalm 133](#), [1 John 1:1-2:2](#), [John 20:19-31](#)

*** Transcript ***

Won't you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be fruitful and true and pleasing to you, O God. Amen.

It was the first day of the week, and Peter (who denied even knowing Jesus just a few days previously) and another disciple have now seen the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene has encountered Jesus himself, who she recognized only after he called her by name. And now we're told that Jesus has come to be among the disciples — the disciples who are huddled behind locked doors, filled with fear. And Jesus says to them, "Peace be with you." And he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. And that Spirit is not just upon them, but within them. But someone was missing from their midst, Thomas.

While the rest of the disciples were sheltering together — confused, disappointed, afraid — we don't know why Thomas wasn't with them. But the Gospel according to John tells us that Thomas Didymus, Thomas the Twin, wasn't there when Jesus first appears among the disciples, so he has to hear about their encounter with the risen messiah second hand. I wonder if he felt jealous, if he felt left out. Perhaps he felt like he missed out on an opportunity that everyone else had been given. So we shouldn't be surprised, really, that he says, "I want to see him too." I don't think Thomas says this because he needs evidence of the Resurrection, but rather because he longs to encounter the risen Christ himself.

And Jesus meets him there. Thomas needs to see the wounds on Jesus' body. He needs to experience the living God through encountering the traumatized Jesus. Thomas needs to know that Jesus' suffering was real, and that Jesus will continue to show up in suffering. The Resurrection does not suddenly erase suffering, but it does assure us that nothing — not suffering, not fear, not doubt, not confusion, not even a locked door — can keep us from encountering the love of God. It was a whole week later, we're told, when Jesus appeared to Thomas. And I wonder if Thomas' hope dwindled during that week. He must have wondered if he'd missed out forever.

We can feel this way too, if we start to compare our experiences with God to others around us. We might find ourselves feeling jealous, or even feeling skeptical or suspicious of someone else's experience. We might long for Jesus to meet us where we need him most.

Jesus appears again to the disciples, and this time Thomas is there. And Jesus does not scold him or question him or make any mention of the fact that Thomas' experience is somehow different than the other disciples. He simply offers his broken body to him, because that is how Thomas enters into relationship with the Christ who is risen from the dead. The broken body given for Thomas. The broken body given for you, for me.

We can get hung up on this story being about "Doubting Thomas." But this is not about the doubt of Thomas. It's about the deep grace of Christ and his willingness to come to Thomas and meet him right

where he is. And verse 31 tells us why he does this: so that through the encounter with the transformed, living Christ, we might believe — and through believing have real life.

Thomas' response to Jesus, saying, "My Lord and my God, my Lord *and* my God," he bridges together his past experience of living with the presence of Jesus and his future of being empowered by the Spirit of God. In the experience of the broken body, the wounded hands, Thomas can become the hands of Christ in the world, because believing is about more than what one thinks or understands. It's about what one does.

And we know from the reading from Acts that the life of the disciples going forward was the life of doing and living in a community of radical belonging and radical love of neighbor. The disciples are of one heart, one soul, one mind. Through their unity they bear witness to the resurrected Christ, and the result is that everyone has what they need.

Psalm 133 says how good it is when kindred live together in unity. And our reading from 1 John urges us to live together in fellowship. There was suffering in the world then. And there is suffering in the world now. The alleluia of the Easter morning does not erase that reality. But God promises to show up and be with us in life. In all of it. God promises that no one will be left out of his abundance. Mary needed to encounter Jesus in her confusion and grief, and Jesus met her there and called her by name. The disciples needed to encounter Jesus in their fear, and Jesus met them there with peace, bringing the Holy Spirit to them. Thomas needed to encounter the scarred and broken Jesus for himself, and Jesus met him there. In a way, perhaps we are Thomas' twin, because we too weren't there and yet we hold out for our own encounter with the resurrected Christ.

And this is the promise of the Resurrection. Not just a promise of life, but a promise of relationship with a God who meets us where we are. Two thousand years later we, like Thomas, can also say, "I want to see him too." And we can trust that Jesus will meet us in the place where we need him to. It doesn't look the same for each of us. Christ reveals himself to us in intimate and unique ways, not to prove something, but to empower his continued ministry through us by the work of the Holy Spirit. The result of the Resurrection is that we can fully experience God's provision of abundance through the love we share with our neighbors.

On Maundy Thursday, we read together the words written by Teresa of Ávila in the 1500s, and I want to share them again today:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on the world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

I invite you to think about your own encounter with the risen Christ. How is Jesus being revealed to you? And how are you empowered by this encounter with Christ to live in community, to care for others, to be cared for by others, for the sake of abundant life? As we sing together our hymn of the day, let us think about what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today.

Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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