

Where is Thomas?

April 15, 2007

(Easter 2 - Year C)

John 20: 19-31

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

In today's Gospel reading from John, the action begins with Easter night.

On Easter night, Jesus comes and stands among the disciples and says
"Peace be with you."

Jesus shows the disciples his hands and his side.

Jesus breathes on the disciples and says:

"Receive the Holy Spirit."

But, Thomas, one of the remaining eleven disciples, is not there.

Thomas misses out on the whole scene.

Which makes me wonder:

Where is Thomas?

It seems that a lot of interesting things keep happening to me while I am
at Whataburger.

As I have told you before, I like to go to Whataburger in the morning on
my way into the office for one of Whataburger's breakfast
taquitos.

I usually go into Whataburger at least 2 or 3 mornings a week.

But, last week, the church office was closed on the Monday after Easter
Day.

And, on the Monday after Easter, I went to Whataburger for lunch,
instead of for breakfast.

Since it was the day after Easter and I was off, I did not have on my
clergy collar.

Instead, I had on a sweatshirt and a baseball cap.

After I had ordered my lunch and sat at a table,
A server came and brought me my burger.
She put down my tray, then she did a double take and said:
“Oh, it’s you - I almost didn’t recognize you without your stuff on.”

I replied to her:

“Well, I am taking the day off today.
You know, yesterday was a big day for me.
So, I am taking it a little easy today.”
The server gave a little grin, then she walked off.

A few minutes later, a man came over to my table and said:

“Sorry, but I couldn’t help but overhear what you were saying to that
lady.

And, you know, I gotta tell you - I understand just how you feel.
Because you’re right, yesterday sure was a big day.”

I smiled at him a little and said:

“Yes, yesterday sure was a big day.”

Then, this man said:

“You know, I was worried though about how the weather was going to
affect everything, but it all turned out OK in the end.”

I said:

“I know, I was worried, too, that the weather would affect the crowds.
But, the crowd was pretty good.”

Then, my new friend said:

“And, I’m a little embarrassed to say it, but I gotta tell you that I got
pretty emotional yesterday.”

And, I chimed in:

“Well, I know what you mean, it was a pretty emotional day.”

Then, the man said:

“Yea, ‘cause I gotta tell you - that I cried just like a baby when they put
that green jacket on Zach Johnson at the Master’s Tournament.”

Of course, I was talking about the worship of Easter Day, but this guy
was talking about the Master’s Golf Tournament.

For, while I was celebrating and preaching here at the church,
With 60 Easter lilies on the altar and a full choir and children hunting
eggs and handbells ringing out,
Some people were at home watching the Master's Golf Tournament on
TV, crying like a baby with heart-felt emotion.

While 10 of the remaining disciples of Jesus were hearing reports from
the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead,
While Jesus mysteriously entered the room through locked doors,
While Jesus showed the nail wounds in his hands and side,
The apostle Thomas was at home watching a golf tournament on TV.

For, one of the unanswered questions of Holy Scripture is:
Where the heck was Thomas, to have missed all the good, juicy stuff of
the Sunday of the Resurrection?

There is no record in John's Gospel that the disciples were disgusted
with Thomas for missing the appearance of the resurrected Jesus.
The disciples *don't blame* Thomas for his absence and say:
"Thomas, where were you, man?"
The disciples *don't* say to Thomas:
"I can't believe that you missed Easter worship and watched the
Master's Tournament on TV."

For, the risen Jesus comes among the faithful who were there on that
first Easter Day.

And, the risen Jesus comes among Thomas, who stayed home and
missed out on the events of Resurrection Sunday.

For, while many of us were here in this church last Sunday, other people
were home watching TV, or sleeping in and enjoying a snow
covered morning with the newspaper, or eating a big brunch at
home.

And, on the Sunday *after* Easter, Thomas finally shows up.
On that Sunday after Easter, Jesus comes among the disciples and the
first words out of Jesus' mouth are not:

“Thomas, why weren’t you in church on Easter?”

The first words out of Jesus’ mouth are:

“Peace be with you.”

Then, he says:

“Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt but believe.”

It is my belief that we have a huge opportunity here at St. Alban’s to welcome the other Thomas’ in the Waco area.

For, if we think that everyone in Waco was in church on Easter, then we don’t have a very good pulse on what is *really* going on in this town.

In my vision for the years ahead, I believe that the future mission of St. Alban’s Episcopal Church will be closely linked with how we welcome the Thomas’ of Waco into our midst.

Will we say to the Thomas’ in our community:

“What do you mean you don’t you go to church?”

Or will we say?:

“Peace be with you.”

For, the grace of the risen Christ is that Jesus comes among faithful church goers and says:

“Peace be with you.”

And, the grace of the risen Christ is that Jesus also comes among people of doubt and says:

“Peace be with you.

Put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt, but believe.”

Before we go and judge someone as holy or unholy based on the outward showiness of their faith,

We need to remember that only *one person* in the Gospel of John ever refers to Jesus as “God.”

That person is Thomas, the one who missed Easter Day, the one who slept in, the one who stayed at home to watch a golf tournament on TV.

That one person is Thomas, who cries out to Jesus, with heart-felt emotion:

“My Lord and my God!”

AMEN.

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