

Sermon on John 20:19-31 for All Saints Millington

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The Gospel for today, from John, is about Doubting Thomas. That's a phrase we've heard all our lives. Do you know someone who's a Doubting Thomas? Are you a Doubting Thomas? Do you require proof of something's existence? It's part of these post-resurrection appearances in which the followers of Jesus really didn't know what to do when they encountered him.

In this scenario, we see something that is reflected in the Gospels, the epistles, the traditions, and the creeds of our belief system – the humanity of the risen Christ. The early church was conflicted by different opinions on who exactly Christ was. The Docetists in the 3rd century declared that Jesus was not at all human, but rather simply an illusion, or what we might call a hologram. Docetism was rejected by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and in our Nicene Creed, we declare both the divinity and the humanity of Christ. Other schools of thought in the early church affirmed Jesus' humanity over his divinity, and many councils were assembled to deal with these and many other disagreements.

The Gospels tell us, though, that after Jesus was resurrected, he was “somehow corporeal...touchable, and able to eat.”¹ Instead of being resurrected as a completely divine entity, Jesus retains some of his humanity. He can eat a piece of fish. He can be touched. He can breathe onto the frightened disciples to empower them with the Holy Spirit. The body of Jesus, as the book of Acts tells us, did not experience corruption. Peter says: “God raised him up, having freed him from

¹ Loewe, William P, and Hoopla Digital. 2016. *The College Student's Introduction to Christology*, p. 125. United States: Liturgical Press.

death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.” William Loewe in his book on Christology says that the resurrected Jesus’ “humanity has been transformed.”²

Even with all these theological perspectives, it is still impossible to know what Jesus’ humanity was transformed into. All we can determine is that somehow Jesus, in spite of his triumph over death, is still – on some incomprehensible level - one of us.

Doubting Thomas – is also one of us. His story is a great example of how, as disciples, we do things that are incredibly human. It’s very human to say, if your friends tell you they saw the Risen Christ, to say “What? I don’t believe that!” I think a lot of us would do exactly the same thing. It’s just too much for us to understand. God’s sense of time, and place, and events is far beyond anything our human brains can imagine. So any of us would have probably said “I’m going to need to see that myself.” And that’s exactly what Thomas does. It’s a way of showing that the disciples are just like us. The disciples are us.

We require some kind of - not just knowledge and learning about Jesus - but some kind of encounter with Jesus in order to believe. We don’t require scientific proof – empirical data – that says “Jesus is this – Jesus is this thing beyond our understanding”, but we require some sort of experience of Jesus. And I think that any of us who believe would tell the world “Yes, I have had some kind of an experience of Jesus and that is why I believe.” Whether it’s an experience where you see people doing the good works that Jesus spoke of or hear a proclamation of

² ibid

the Good News of Jesus Christ and it touches your heart and you have an experience. Whether you actually have a vision of Jesus or you encounter Jesus in the scriptures. Whether you have some sort of thing in your life that you could qualify as a miracle of Jesus. Whether it's healing or getting you through a rough time, feeling the presence of Jesus around you, comforting you. These are the things that help us come to the belief in our Savior, and these post-resurrection appearances are a wonderful time for us to remember those moments in our own lives.

Jesus, when he walked the earth before his death and resurrection, commanded us to love one another. He did not reject our humanity as something misbegotten, fundamentally flawed, or evil. He reminded us that our humanity is part of God's creation, and that it is always good and worthy of love. Our task is not to reject our material selves or cut ourselves off from our fellow humans, but to live into our humanity and connect on a deep level with the humanity of others. After his resurrection, Jesus did not keep himself distant from the people around him. He connected with them. He let Thomas touch him. He sought out the company of his disciples to comfort and guide them.

Jesus was, and is, connected to us his disciples in all we do, and we are all connected to each other. The breath that he breathed onto the disciples still empowers us today. The collect for today tells us that we have "been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body."

May we all go forward into the world, animated by the breath of the Holy Spirit, to serve as the body of our Savior Jesus Christ in all we do. Amen.