

Sunday, April 15, 2007  
Given by the Rev. M. Peter Harer

Easter 2 C

Whereas Easter Sunday seems to bring people out of the woodwork to church, the apostle Thomas skipped Easter Sunday and shows up on the Sunday after Easter when hardly anyone else is there. The Sunday after Easter is traditionally referred to as “Low Sunday”. However, is it called Low Sunday because it is only the stalwart faithful members who come to church that day, or does it also have something to do with Thomas?

I have never heard Thomas described as such, but he could easily be described as the patron saint of doubters. Of the eleven remaining apostles, only Thomas missed out on seeing the Lord when he appeared to the apostles that Easter night. Thomas wasn't there when that happened. Where Thomas was, we aren't told. Maybe he went out for some cold beer or dropped down to the corner mini-mart for a hoagie and some chips. However, when he got back to the apartment, the other apostles were beside themselves with excitement and told him that they had seen the Lord.

Now give Thomas a break. After all, if I were in his shoes I am sure that I too would have wondered what hallucinogenic substance someone had slipped into the disciples' coffee. It must have struck Thomas as mass delusion for all ten of the other apostles to make such a wild claim. So let's cut Thomas some slack. He simply responded to the apostles' incredible claim the way any of the rest of us

would have. He simply said, “Yea, right. And I just got back from having dinner with the Pope.”

So Thomas, as well as being the patron saint of doubters, can also be thought of as the first modern man. He wanted demonstrable proof of the apostles’ assertion that they had seen the Lord. He announced that he needed visual confirmation of the marks in Jesus’ hands and side before he could believe. Here again, apart from the rather bad press that Thomas has gotten over the last two thousand years, how can any one fault him for wanting proof? Even with the testimony of ten other apostles on a stack of Bibles, Thomas had to see for himself. I personally admire that sort of independent streak in Thomas. Why should he believe the other apostles without some sort of confirmation or proof?

We, of course, have no way to confirm in a scientific way what the apostles told Thomas. All we have is the testimony of scripture and the church through these two thousand years. And for some people, this is not enough. They need something more. They won’t take your word for it or mine, or the church’s or the scripture’s. I have to admit that I am sympathetic to them. They aren’t stubborn, wicked or evil. They just aren’t able to come to faith the same way you have and I have.

This then puts us in something of a bind. That’s because we clearly want to believe in the Lord’s resurrection, but we have no way to prove it. We can only

rely upon faith. But we need to be clear; faith is not the same thing as certainty. In fact faith and certainty are opposites. There are few things in life that we can be certain about, except perhaps the two famous items of death and taxes as Benjamin Franklin taught us. I am, however, certain of very little else. I have faith that the sun will come up tomorrow, even though as a matter of probability, it will; I have faith that an airplane will land safely when I get on it, or even that my wife loves me, but I am not certain about any of these things. And so it is with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Fortunately I have come to be very comfortable living without certainty in many aspects of my life. That's why I would never be comfortable being part of a church where every word or sentence of the Bible is treated as a certainty and that nothing can be questioned. Even many scientists, especially quantum physicists, have come to realize that there is an element of uncertainty built into the universe, and that science may never unravel the mysteries of the created order. Faith, then, is not just an aspect of religion; it is an aspect of daily life.

So while I can't prove that the apostles really saw the Lord, they obviously saw something that transformed them from a dispirited band of forlorn followers of Jesus, to a group of people filled with the sense of mission that they had seen the Lord and that the Lord had a world changing job for them to do. Therefore, they

proved with their lives that they truly had seen the Lord and that the Lord was working through them to redeem the world.

So it is with us. The only way that I can prove that my faith in the risen Lord is true is in how I live my life. I'm reminded of a story I heard recently about a man who developed a bad case of road rage. When someone cut him off on the road, he started swearing, making rude gestures and hurling obscenities out his car window. A little while later, the man noticed that the car behind him was following him. Eventually he pulled over and went back to the driver behind him. He asked, "Why are you following me?" The other driver replied, "I saw your bumper sticker and thought I'd follow you to see what church it is you belong to so that I know not to take my kids there." The other man's bumper sticker read: "Follow me to Sunday School."

Thomas got what he wanted. He got to see the risen Lord for himself, and he believed. We, I trust, can see the risen Lord in each other; we whose lives have been touched by him, even transformed by him, are the only living testimony to the Lord's resurrection. My prayer is that others who see me may in some way go home to families and friends and say as the apostles said to Thomas so long ago, "Today I have seen the Lord."