

Sermon for Year B Easter 2
April 23, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC
The Reverend Jeanne Finan

Can we handle the truth?

This morning in John's gospel we hear about the disciple Thomas.
He is often known as "Doubting Thomas."

Many of us grew up
 being taught, either directly or indirectly,
 that it was NOT good to be a doubter like Thomas.
To be good was to be an instant and enthusiastic believer.
 (Perhaps that is why we have such affection for Thomas!)

But I don't see Thomas as a doubter at all.
I see Thomas as someone who is seeking the truth.
I see Thomas as an unusual someone
 who does not just go along with the crowd,
 but is willing to stand up and say,
 Sorry, I just don't buy this.
 I need a little more evidence.

Remember, Thomas is no fly-by-night disciple.
Thomas is as loyal to Jesus as a disciple can possibly be.
If you look back to Chapter 11 in John's gospel,
 you find it is Thomas who speaks out, speaks up,
 telling the other disciples they must go with Jesus—
 even when Jesus wants to travel back to Judea,
 back to where the Jews desired to stone him to death.

 Thomas says,
 Let us also go, that we may die with him. (John 11:16)
Thomas is a devoted disciple.

The writer of John's gospel
 seems to entangle Thomas in this situational trap:
 Choose, Thomas! Do you believe in Jesus or not?!!

But wait! Thomas' love for Jesus is real and tangible and strong.
Thomas acts from a place of integrity.

Thomas cannot believe what the other disciples are telling him,
 because he cannot bear the possibility of loving an impostor,
 loving a lie.
Jesus is too important to Thomas.

Thomas steadfastly refuses to believe what may be just a fantasy
of what the disciples wish to be true.

Jesus knows and loves Thomas, too.
Jesus understands the depth of Thomas' love for him.
Jesus returns when Thomas IS there with the other disciples,
and the very first thing Jesus says is,
Peace be with you.

Peace be with you.
Imagine how our relationships would change
if we began our conversations—
especially our conversations with those who question us,
with those we disagree--
if the first thing we said to them was,
Peace be with you.

Jesus appears and says,
Peace be with you.
Then he opens his whole self to Thomas and invites him--
Thomas, come and... *put your finger here and see my hands.*
Reach out your hand and put it in my side. (John 20:27).

Jesus understands who Thomas is and loves him for whom he is.
Thomas does not pretend to be whom he is not.
That makes the other disciples a bit edgy and irritated.
But Jesus comes to Thomas.
Jesus meets Thomas where Thomas is.

Jesus does that with each of us.
Jesus sees our heart.
We can hide from others, we can lie to others, we can fake it with others.
But the truth is right out there on the table with Jesus.
We must never forget that.

In all honesty, we seldom like people who tell the truth.
They terrify us.
Because you know how those truth-seeking, truth-telling folks are—
the next thing you know,
they'll want us to start telling the truth.
about ourselves!

In the film *A Few Good Men*,
Colonel Nathan Jessep, played by Jack Nicholson,
screams out in the courtroom.
You want answers? You want the truth?!!!
You can't handle the truth!

Colonel Jessep is right.
He could be screaming at most of us.
Even when we say we want the truth,
We often don't want and can't take the truth--
especially if it is about ourselves.

Our real fear is that other people
won't be able to handle the truth about us.
But Thomas realizes the truth is all there is.
Everything else is illusion.

There is an interesting article by Father Laurence Freeman
in the March issue of the *Christian Meditation Newsletter*.
He writes:

Addiction is merely the tragic consequence of mistaken identity.
We thought this substance or this activity
would help us find what we were looking for...
In fact it turned out to be a demon
masquerading as an angel of light
and now we are hooked.
Our thirst for God
*has become diverted and we are drinking poison instead.*¹

Addiction to a substance or to an activity
numbs us to the truth,
enables us to deny what is right in front of us—
and trust me, it is right in front of everyone else as well.

Thomas seeks the truth.
Because he knows it is only the truth that will give him freedom.
Freedom to be whom God has created him to be.
Freedom to do God's work in the world.
Freedom to face himself in the mirror.

Easter is not one day in our church.
Easter is a season.
Easter is the season of resurrection, of transformation.

¹ Laurence Freeman, OSB, *Christian Meditation Newsletter*, Vol. 30, No. 1, March 2006.

Not just the transformation of Jesus,
but the opportunity for our own transformation,
our own resurrection.

Easter is the season when we are invited to seek the truth:
Put your finger here and see my hands
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Easter is the season we are invited to celebrate the truth,
to leave the dark realm of secrets and shames
and to stand in the light of Christ.
Thanks be to God!

The good news is that we do not do this work alone.
As we heard in the first letter of John,
...for whatever is born of God conquers the world.

As difficult and as painful and as risky as it may be,
only the truth will set us free.

The question is not really whether we doubt or whether we believe,
The question is:

Will we seek
 what is really true?
Can we handle the truth?
Can we celebrate the truth in our own lives and in the lives of others?

I believe Thomas would tell us,
Yes!
My Lord and my God! Yes!