

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 15, 2012

There is a common belief today that we are saved by having the right thoughts about God. Of course, having true thoughts and beliefs about God is healthy and good. But even good thoughts and beliefs which don't produce faithful actions and relationships are not all that terribly helpful. Faith which stays in our heads is not a living faith. In the Scriptures and early church, faith is a verb—an action word which brings good in the world—not simply a belief which makes us feel good about ourselves or keeps us from being overwhelmed by anxiety. Faith is not a mind game—it's a living experience! This week's readings show this.

Psalm 133 reminds me of young families. It speaks of when brothers and sisters get along in unity. I'm sure you've seen it, when children are playing together happily versus when they are at each other's throats and fussing and grumbling. The Psalm also sheds light on adult family members when they have good relationships. This is the stuff of blessing. Faith brings unity because it draws us together into a common mission of love and mercy.

Acts also speaks of unity. . .of the early believers. Their trust in the love of the risen Lord influenced their finances and what they did with their piles of stuff. They overcame the anxiety we all have of not having enough stuff—or manna as we talked about several weeks ago—and shared among themselves. If someone needed, they provided. If they had more than they needed, they offered it to the leaders to be distributed to the poor. In those days there was no safety net. If you were hungry and homeless without family, there was virtually no way to survive. As the movement of the followers of Jesus Christ grew, opposition to them also grew. Those who joined this new household of God were sometimes rejected by their families. In those cases, sisters and brothers in faith shared. The early church had a very strong sense of community.

John the Elder proclaims that God is light who cleanses and freely forgives those who confess their sin and weakness. John defines fellowship as mutual confession which celebrates Grace and Love rather than fearful instinct. This true spirituality is a fellowship of friends who welcome the stranger with love as their risen Lord welcomes them.

[This fellowship grows out of the risen Lord's choice of love over life. For Jesus there is no life without love. Funny how our instincts define life by “comfort” and “staying alive.”]

Then there is honest Thomas, not pretending anything. We can almost see Thomas thinking, “No, I walked with Jesus, heard him teach, saw him bring healing to the weak and the poor--No, his resurrection means nothing until I meet him face to face and put my finger in the nail marks and my hand in his side.” He overstated what he needed. When he saw Jesus, he defined his faith, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus responds, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Blessed are those who press on to meet the risen Lord and do not give up until they do.

What does it mean to believe in the risen Lord? Like Thomas, it can't be a head experience. It cannot be just a belief that we have about God. We must relate directly to Jesus. You might ask, “What does that mean?” Thomas chose to believe. The gospels report that there were some who saw Jesus and they did not believe. Seeing is believing? No, it is not. Thomas was willing to be led. Are we willing to be led? Or must we be our own driver, driven by our instincts, following our own gut reactions even

if that means we fail to ever know what it means to choose to love our neighbor.

Listen in your life for the risen Lord to speak to you. Meet him with your sisters and brothers in faith. Meet him at the Table of Mercy. Meet him with your mind. Meet him with your body. Meet him out in creation. Make room for him in stillness so that he may lead you into wholeness, healing, and good relationships with neighbor, family, and the creatures and plants of God's creation. The risen Lord is moving in our midst. He met Thomas, and the faithful members of the early church. He came as Light and Love. He comes as Light and Love. He meets us in the eyes of those we meet day to day. Sometimes he stands against us and our fearfulness, our resistance to the chances and changes of our lives. Sometimes he embraces us in our times of weakness—crying out for help in so many different ways.

If we are looking for a person to person encounter with the risen Christ as Thomas or if our expectations are too specific, we will probably be disappointed. Radical openness is fertile ground for faith to grow. In fact, without openness there is no faith, no love, no fellowship. The Saints have often referred to this as poverty. We are not complete by ourselves. We need to receive—from God.

Faith is waiting, hoping, trusting, allowing these to transform us into servants of the risen Lord. He will not fail to meet us if we allow him to arrange the meeting with our open spirit.

So I ask it again, “How has the risen Lord met you?” Also, how have you opened up yourself to meeting him. How do we as a congregation meet our Lord? How do we actively invite others by our lives and choices to meet the risen Lord?

Come, Lord Jesus, Come.