

This Gospel story is really aimed at two different groups of people....

The first group of people that this story is written for is all those John's community who never personally knew Jesus, because none of them did.

John wrote his Gospel 70 years after the crucifixion and Resurrection.

If anyone was alive at time of the Resurrection they would have been an infant or young child.

None of them were any of the adults in that locked upper room when Jesus appeared to his friends and disciples...

So to hear Jesus call them...those that had not seen yet believed...

to hear Jesus call them blessed at the end of the story

well....must have been HUGELY affirming!

It also must have given them miraculous courage

because at this time John's community

was being fiercely persecuted by Rome.

John wanted to help them sustain their faith in Christ

before the lions, literally, in the emperor's arena...

he wanted them to know that their faith in Christ

was worth their suffering and death.

and we know many of them did indeed

endure and stay true to their faith in Christ...

For them to hear and believe that Jesus had risen,

that he was alive must have been so powerful, so comforting

But there is more to this story....

The second group of people this story is intended for are those that I would

call "Thomas People"

You know...I've often felt sorry for Thomas...

I think he's gotten a bad rap through the ages...

Yet, I can understand his hesitancy to believe his friends...

Thomas knew that Jesus was crucified and *no one* survives that!

So on one hand he was cautious...

which isn't a bad thing....

On the other hand he was pretty bold and audacious:

"I want to see the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side"

he wanted to see for himself...before he would agree it was the man he had loved and followed for so long...

Thomas wasn't there the week before

when Jesus first appeared to his friends...

So, he's honest with them...

yeah right...

unless I can see and feel him...

I can't, I won't believe your story...

For centuries, Thomas has been called "Doubting Thomas"

and it hasn't been a compliment!

It is often comes with an implied tsk, tsk' now...now Thomas...

you should have more faith than that.

Our reading today affirms a person's desire to have a real experience of Christ and not just to believe because of what other people say....

Jesus did not think less of Thomas because

he did not believe the testimony of his friends,

He invited Thomas to do what he needs to do in order to believe...

"Come Thomas.... see my wounds....touch my side...,

feel for yourself, it really is me...I am alive!"

**This should not be understood as a criticism....
This should not be heard as a harsh judgment...
but as a loving invitation by Jesus to Thomas
to truly know that death was not the end of life...
to know that is some mysterious, transformed way,
he, Jesus, the crucified one was still alive and
indeed the testimony of his friends was true.**

**“Come Thomas...see for yourself...I am alive!”
Then Thomas utters that memorable line:**

“My Lord and my God.”

**It is not an intellectual acknowledgement....
but a confession of the heart...**

“My Lord and my God”...

**My Lord and my God...it is true!
You are alive!
Life does not end with death...
Life in some beautiful and unexplainable way does continue.**

**No matter who you are...or when you live,
Now matter how you come to believe
or whether you are hesitant, bold or audacious
You are invited to do what you need to do to
to ask for what you need to deeply know in your heart...
not your head that Life never ends...**

**And once you understand that Life continues forever,
that death is simply the doorway to a new and transformed way of being alive and held in
Holy Love....**

**Then, you will find the courage, the peace, and the joy
that the world can not give....**

**You will find strength and hope
far beyond what you think you are capable of...**

So how do we hear this story?

Do we see ourselves more like members of John's community...

**because none of us were alive when Jesus was,
none of us were in the upper room for any of the appearances...**

Perhaps we do believe the testimony of others.

We can, then, consider ourselves 'Blessed' for believing and not seeing...

we can hear our faith affirmed and

we can find the strength, the courage and the grace to help us deal

with the trials and tribulations of our lives...

Or perhaps we consider ourselves more like Thomas...

needing some personal experience of the Risen Christ...

So, if we are more like Thomas what is our request?

I won't believe until _____ and you can fill in the blank.

What is it that you need to SEE,

**What is that you need to FEEL so that you might
truly, deeply know for yourself that he still lives?**

Do you need to feel God's peace? wisdom?

strength? hope? Mercy? forgiveness? joy?

Love???

**It is absolutely ok to ask for what you need
so that you can believe....**

**Whether we see ourselves as faithful believers
or we see ourselves more like Thomas,
all of us can hear Christ is saying to each and every one of us:
it is true.**

Life never ends.

Death is but a doorway to new life.

I have risen....and so will you.

And for this Good News we can truly whisper, Thank you! amen