

A week has passed since we celebrated Easter Sunday and shouted Alleluia. However, our gospel this morning takes us back to that first Easter Sunday evening where the disciples are gathered behind locked doors for fear of the religious authorities. They are likely pondering the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb that morning, and also Mary Magdalene's proclamation – I have seen the Lord!

And then Jesus appears among them. The disciples are filled with joy. Jesus breathes on them and gives them Holy Spirit. However, Thomas, one of the disciples, misses Jesus' appearance. When the disciples see him, they echo the words Mary Magdalene said to them that morning – We have seen the Lord. And Thomas replies – "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

I love that Thomas' response was recorded. Note that when Mary Magdalene tells the disciples the same thing – I have seen the Lord - earlier that day, it doesn't say whether the disciples believed or didn't believe. The gospel doesn't say anything about their response. Perhaps they were contemplating what to make of the news that Jesus was alive. Maybe they were starting to understand the words Jesus had said to them. Perhaps they had their doubts but didn't dare voice them. We don't know, but we know about Thomas. He was not going to believe until he saw Jesus for himself. And blessedly, Thomas is given the gift of seeing Jesus – with Jesus even offering to let him touch his hands and place his hand in Jesus' side. And Thomas believes. Jesus asks – Do you believe because you have seen? Happy are those who don't see, but yet believe.

All these stories that come after the resurrection are those of the disciples and others coming to understand what has happened, coming to understand that their teacher has risen from the dead. It is a process and belief took time to grow and blossom. Some saw and some did not. Some saw in different ways. Others had an experience that led them to believe. In time, the early church came to believe in their Savior Jesus Christ who had risen from the dead.

As a child, I remember being very judgmental of Thomas. How could he not believe his friends that they had seen Jesus? How could they not understand what had happened? Especially after all the hints Jesus gave them along the way. As an adult, I am grateful for Thomas being willing to be honest about where he was and asking for what he needed. For one thing I have learned as I grew from child to adult is that belief in God, belief in Jesus Christ is a process –a life-long journey that continues through all of the experiences in life.

Mary Magdalene began with recognizing her teacher outside the tomb and telling the disciples she had seen the Lord. The disciples began by seeing the empty tomb, hearing Mary's witness, then seeing Jesus for themselves. Thomas begins by hearing

the disciples witness, declaring his disbelief and seeing for himself. This was the beginning of their belief in the risen Christ and they all came to differently. There was much more to come in their journey. They would have more experiences. They would see others come to believe – people who had never even known Jesus in person. They would welcome Gentiles and travel to preach the Gospel. The small band of people who travelled with Jesus would grow and expand to today when we - people who live thousands of miles away are following Jesus.

I am grateful for their stories because they help me in my journey to know Christ. I know there will be experiences of Christ, the witness of others and that it is ok to question and doubt. What I want to ask you today is whether you can tell your story of coming to know Christ. If you know your story, then you can share it with others so that it can help them on their journey. Would you be willing to write yours down? Perhaps you have done it already. This writing of one's faith journey is something that those considering ordination in the church are asked to do, but I believe it is important for all of us who follow Christ to do.

I am going to share mine as an example and ask you to think about sometime this week to start writing yours down – I say start because often it takes time to sort it out. And just so you know this is the short form of mine.

I grew up in a Christian household and a Christian society in the West Indies. As a child, just about everyone I knew believed in Jesus. There was no one else. Jesus was the one I prayed to and trusted. Jesus died for me. Jesus taught me how to live. I knew the stories of his life.

In college, I wandered away from Christian practice – going to church, reading scripture and regular prayer. Jesus was still in my heart, but I didn't have the words to explain why he was important and at times I wondered why I believed. Receiving communion drew me back into church. It was a nourishment I had missed when I was away from church and while I still couldn't articulate my beliefs, I knew I needed the body and blood of Christ.

Later I had an experience of God at a retreat which turned my life upside down. I experienced God in a way I never had before. God became real – not in a way I could describe, but in a way that I felt. I didn't need to prove God anymore. I had been in God's presence.

In seminary, I heard people talk about knowing Jesus in a way that that I didn't think I knew. Sometimes, I thought about leaving. If this was what was needed for an ordained person, then I'd better get out of there. A wise professor helped me see that I was on the way and to be patient. In preaching and teaching the gospels for over 15 years, Jesus has slipped deeper and deeper into my soul in a way that I couldn't see in seminary. I continue on this journey knowing Jesus is always calling and holding me up through the ups and downs of life. When the chips are down, I stop and ask Jesus to sit by me and help me find my way.

What is your story of coming to know Jesus – the risen Christ? If you have not written it down, can you start? Think about who Christ was to you as a child, in your teen years, as a young adult, a middle-aged adult or older adult? Write down the ups and downs, the times of doubt, and the times of joy. When you are ready, share your story.

Will you share your witness so that others may receive it just as we have received Thomas' witness with his doubts, Mary Magdalene's witness with her proclamation of seeing the Risen Christ and the witness of all the other disciples who have shared their stories of coming to know the risen Christ.