

## MAKING CONTACT

Could it be that all Thomas ever wanted was to be known, held and loved by God and be reassured that this love would continue? From the moment we are held as infants by our parents we yearn for the loving and reassuring presence that never leaves us and travels with us through all the trials of our life. In fact this sustaining love is the very breath of God, the source of life itself, as Thomas and his disciples discovered in today's gospel story.

One of the greatest fears we have as human beings is to be abandoned, rejected, or excluded—especially by those whom we depend for love and even survival. I believe this was the case for Thomas. I believe this is the case for us. And so I return to my original question, “Could it be that the question behind all of Thomas’ questions was simply can I be truly known, held and loved by God no matter what happens in my life?”

Many of us have heard different sermons over the years about the apostle Thomas; after all he is our parish's namesake. I can't speak for you but I know I have learned to feel less guilty for having my doubts and fears. I hope the same is true for you. I hope all of us are feeling more empowered to be honest about our relationship with God and ask the hard questions that need to be asked about our Christian faith—not only on an intellectual level but on the heart level as well.

Just the other day I was talking with a parent here at St. Thomas and learned that one of most important the reasons he is here at our church is that he knows that it is not only okay to ask questions about our faith but it is strongly encouraged and safe to do so. This astute parent went on to say that he wants his children to know that curiosity, engagement with the big questions, and pursuing, with passion, the ultimate mysteries of life are at the heart of being human and being alive with Christ.

It was just last weekend at the Easter Vigil that we gathered around five beautiful children that had be baptized and prayed this prayer, “Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.”

This is also a prayer for those eleven disciples hidden in a house in Jerusalem who were also experiencing the fears caused by changes beyond their control and the process of new birth. They were a spiritual family torn apart and traumatized by the violent loss of their primary teacher, Jesus; whom they had relied upon much like children depend on the wisdom, and strength of their parents until they can fly on their own.

These scared disciples received the Peace of the resurrected Jesus and immediately afterwards Jesus shows them healed wounds on his hands and side. He is not a ghost. He is real, very real. He reveals himself as fully divine and fully human but in a body that has been transformed into something even more glorious than what they had known before. Jesus was fully alive—more alive and glorious than ever—and had come back to reconnect them to him and to each other. Jesus also reminds them all that His mission is still not over. For His family to heal from the broken relationships and be delivered from fear they must receive the Holy Spirit who will give them the power to forgive themselves, each other, and even God for leaving them so their broken hearts could begin to heal.

But not all of the members of Jesus' family are there to receive the hopeful message. Thomas is gone when Jesus comes back to them. None of the Gospels tell us where he has been. Had he been booted out of the group for his lack of faith? Did he run out for food? Had his guilt for abandoning Jesus hit him so hard that he thought he had sinned more than all of the rest? How things could have gone so terribly bad when all he ever wanted was to be known, held and loved by God?

In my imagination, Jesus came back to make another display of the marks of the crucifixion because Thomas' prayer and deep desire to be close to God invited Jesus back. Isn't that one of the greatest moments of resurrection and new life that we humans can ever experience? We rejoice when God comes back for us after we have felt left behind and then restores us to right relationship with Him and those we love—especially after we have been disconnected or separated from our loved ones because of some sort of loss, disagreement, estrangement or death.

In 1985 the famous American astronomer and author Carl Sagan wrote a fascinating novel called *Contact* that was later made into a movie starring Jodie Foster as Dr. Ellie Arroway, the forever-searching and questioning astronomer. It is a story about a girl who tragically lost both of her parents at an early age and whose grief propelled her to search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (which by the way is another way to describe God). Earning a PhD in astronomy, she becomes committed to empirical science and initially opposes the faith claims of religion

until she falls in love with an ordained minister and has an experience of love that cannot be explained by science alone.

There is a very moving part in the movie when Dr. Arroway is transported through technology provided by an advanced civilization on the planet Vega. It is there that the higher life form chooses to first reveal his presence through the loving persona of her deceased father so as to not frighten her. It is there that she receives the hopeful message that humanity will one day be able to transcend the limits of time and space and be able to engage with worlds not yet imaginable.

He sends her back to earth with a message of hope and peace. Ironically she now finds herself believing in an experience she cannot prove scientifically but knows in her heart that it must be true. She is compelled to continue to spread the good news despite the skepticism, cynicism, and resistance she encounters on earth. She has come alive because she has known a love that transcends loss and transcends all of the usual constraints of time and space. This may be another way to describe Easter. It may be another way to describe heaven: experiencing a love that transcends all of the usual constraints of time and space.

And, so we too, as Jesus' disciples are sent out with a message of hope. We witness to an unbelieving world that believes our message of a love that is limitless and never dies is nothing but fantasy or pure science fiction. Ancient Christians called this special Easter journey as the way of mystery or *mystagogia*. Today, we are gathered together to support each other into living into the wider and deeper mysteries that Easter brings forth. It is a time for us to participate in Christ's resurrection by asking ourselves "What is making me come alive?"

This season of Easter is a time to know the peace, forgiveness, hope, and new life set loose by the Spirit and breathed back into us. It is a time to passionately seek contact with the source of new life known as the Risen Lord Jesus who has triumphed over death, bridged all that separates us, and brings us back from the dead. It is a time to have faith that God will reveal his divinely human presence in the unique and personalized way we need him to appear—just as he did for Thomas, he will do for us. It is a time to have faith that Jesus—more than anything else—wants to make contact with us and remind us that all we ever wanted was to be known, held, and loved by God. God has come back for us! Amen.