

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year A
June 4, 2017 Pentecost
John 20:19-31 • Acts 2:1-11

We learn more about our patron saint, the Apostle Thomas, from the Gospel of John than from any other source in the Bible. You may remember we ran into Thomas a few Sundays back, when Jesus was saying goodbye to his friends, including Thomas. He had just finished saying, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places; I will go and prepare a place for you and will take you myself so that where I am, you may be also.” And remember, “The Father’s House” isn’t a particular place, and it’s not a specific location called “Heaven.” No, for Jesus as we meet him in John’s Gospel, the “Father’s House” describes the intimate, interconnected relationship between Jesus and the Father. And for all that know him and trust him, they become part of that relationship too.

But Thomas doesn’t immediately get this, and so he asks the question we all want to ask.

“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, how can we know the Way?” And Jesus says, “I am the way, the Truth and the Life.” He is saying to Thomas, “When you come into **relationship** with me, you become part of the Way, the Truth and the Life.” He tells Thomas, that is to say, that Heaven is all about relationships. Relationships and trust.

And so we meet Thomas again this morning. Now, to call this the story of “Doubting Thomas” completely misses the point. The focus of the story isn’t on Thomas. It’s on Jesus. We all come to relationship with Jesus from our own particular contexts. And Jesus will always meet us where we are. It’s Jesus’ generous offer of himself to Thomas that’s important here. Thomas happened to need that physical connection to bring him into relationship, and that’s what he felt.

And Jesus has empowered the Church, that’s you and me, to do for the whole world what he did for Thomas. When he meets Thomas and his friends in that locked room and breathes on them – breathes on the breath of God – God’s *ruach* – that’s the Hebrew word for God’s breath – his empowering them to go out and bring the world into relationship with him. By loving one another and loving others as Jesus has loved them, they are revealing God to the world. And when one Church, you and me, reveal God in Christ to the world, we invite the world into relationship with Jesus just as surely as Jesus so generously offered himself to Thomas. And it’s in choosing to be in relationship with God – or not – that sins are forgiven – or retained.

Let’s be really clear about this. The Church doesn’t exist to be an enforcer of the rules. The church exists to be a witness – in season and out – in times of joy, in times of tragedy, in times of fear, in times of celebration – The church exists for one reason and one reason alone – and that is to bear witness to the love of God in Jesus for the whole world. And to invite the

world – everyone – whether they be poor and homeless or rich and powerful or have opinions we don't agree with – to invite everyone into that relationship that has infinite room. That house with so many dwelling places is the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

So you and I have a pretty simple mission statement. Go out and love everyone you meet with the love you've received from Jesus. It is just not that hard to figure out.

Thomas finally got it. According to tradition, Thomas travelled all the way to India to spread the gospel of Jesus' love. What had been given to him with such generosity and grace he needed to share. He needed others to know Jesus the way he did.

It's on this Day of Pentecost that we celebrate the mission we've been given by Jesus. He's breathing on us with God's *ruach*, with that Holy spirit breath, just as he did on that long ago day in that locked room full of scared and anxious friends of his. And this morning we're going to celebrate with the gifts of wind and fire with bagpipes and barbecue and chili – some with beans and some without – the Holy Spirit descending on our little community. I hope our hearts are as ready as Thomas to receive those gifts. I hope we can be as ready as Peter and his friends to share the life giving spirit in a world that is starving for it. That's our mission. To share the love we have from Jesus with all those who are scared and anxious and lonely and lost. To share the love of Jesus with those who have been forgotten. To share the love of Jesus even with the ones who might appear to us to be un-loveable. We'll meet plenty of those folks out there, but they need to know Jesus just like we do.

So let's get a little jump start on our mission this morning. I hope you'll stay for the BBQ. The Keith Highlanders and the Scottish Dancers will be here. Talk about wind. And then we're going to share a tasty feast together. Here's a challenge for us. Find at least one person you don't know and introduce yourself. Don't be shy. That person is here because they want to know Jesus just like you do. So go introduce yourself when yourself. When you're introducing yourself, you know you're also introducing Jesus. And in that generous gesture of relationship, Jesus will be introduced to you too.

So how about it? Let's have a practice round right here this morning. And then get ready to share Jesus' love this week. NOT by getting in anyone's face with it. That's not sharing love, that's sharing anxiety. Just be yourself. Be your loving, listening, cheerful, compassionate self. Be a healer, not a judger. Be a servant, not a commander.

You wouldn't be here today if you didn't have something of supreme to share. Go out and love the folks the way Jesus has loved you. Amen.