

Where Are We Going?

Today's gospel has something to say about our past, our present and our future.

Something like the story of old Scrooge that we hear every Christmas, today's Gospel offers us insight on where we've been, where we are and where we're going from here.

First the past.

Have you ever been tagged with a nickname that just isn't you?

If so, you have a friend in Thomas!

What's Thomas' name down through the ages?

Doubting Thomas!

And what does he do to deserve that?

He's out getting plate lunch for the boys, who are scared to death, hiding out in that locked-up-tight upper room, when suddenly — Jesus is there with them!

And Jesus "shows them his hands and his side."

And they are overjoyed!

Thomas comes back later with an arm full of beef stew, and when he hears this amazing news says:

"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."

And here's the thing — Jesus showed the others his hands and side — before **they** believed!

But only Thomas gets the nickname!

Poor Thomas!

It's even worse when you read about Thomas elsewhere in John's gospel.

Because when Jesus sets out to raise Lazarus from the dead, and the Keystone Cops who are the apostles start moaning that the Jewish leaders will kill Jesus if they see him again, it's Thomas who says, "let's go and die with him!"

Brave Thomas!

Or when Jesus is saying his goodbyes, assuring them that they will follow one day, it's Thomas who says:

"But Lord, how can we follow, we don't know the way."

Leading Jesus to share one of the deepest depths of our faith, as he responds,

"You do know the way, I am the way, the truth and the life...."

Inquisitive Thomas!

And then of course, as we hear this morning, Jesus does appear again.

This time, Thomas is there.

And Thomas is the very first disciple to finally and at long last recognize Jesus for who he is:

"My Lord and my God!"

Enlightened Thomas!

Alas, no one calls Peter "Denying Peter," nor do we call St. Paul "Persecutor Paul."

But poor Thomas, despite his bravery, inquisitiveness and enlightenment, shall be called, for forever and a day, Doubting Thomas.

That part of today's gospel speaks to our past.

But remember, a nickname, even if it sticks, never really defines who you are.

God knows you in your depths.

In your complexity.

In your truth.

And it's God's knowledge of you that really matters.

The gospel also speaks to our present.

Jesus breathes on them.

Giving them (and us) the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It's the same breath that God breathes into Adam at the dawn of creation.

It is the breath that is forever uniting humanity with divinity, the secular and the sacred, heaven and earth.

And with that gift, Jesus gives them (and us) the power that until that moment was reserved only to God: the power to forgive!

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Some folks say that means we get to choose what and who to forgive.

That it's perfectly okay to forgive some stuff and not other stuff.

Which leads many to keep a kind of secret list in their heads of stuff that is forgivable — and stuff that's not

But maybe that's not what Jesus is actually saying.

Remember when we read scripture, we aren't reading the Owners Manual to our car!

It's not enough to just read the words.

We need to pay attention to the context, and to always be on the lookout for the humor or irony or even sarcasm that runs wild throughout this holy book.

Today, the gift of forgiveness that Jesus gives is dripping with irony.

And if you miss the irony, you miss the point!

Think about it.

Where are the apostles?

They're in a locked, dark, room, cowering with fear.

These are the guys who just days earlier betrayed, denied and ran away from Jesus, just when he needed them the most.

And if the definition of sin is separation from God, denying God, well then, could their sin be any worse?

So when Jesus says what you forgive is forgiven, what you don't forgive won't be, do you think these guys can even conceive of NOT forgiving anybody anything, precisely because of the magnitude of what THEY have just been forgiven?

Probably not.

This is crucial to our present lives because of that secret list in my head of what's forgivable and what's not.

Today, Jesus tells us: your secret list has gotta go!

Not because we become super human or super moral; but because we too have been forgiven unforgivable sins.

And even more than that, Jesus knows that refusing to forgive creates prisons, not only for the wrong-doer but for the victim as well.

And Jesus is here to give us freedom; that lightness of being that puts all things in God's good hands, trusting that all will be well.

And finally, this gospel speaks to our future.

Ask any group of church goers what our destiny is and 9 out of 10 will say we die and go to heaven — or hell.

But our true destiny is **not** an immortal soul in heaven.

Our true destiny is a resurrected body on the new earth!

There's a reason so many opt for the Greek philosophy of Plato instead of the resurrection of Jesus when it comes to our true destiny.

There's lots of reasons why we fall in love with the idea of an immortal soul that heads for heaven while the dead body rots in the grave.

First, it assumes that we have an immortal soul that is independent of our body, perhaps even independent of God, and so we have some kind of right to a next life.

We like rights!

Second, if we can ignore what actually happens in the resurrection of Jesus, of his fusing together of heaven and earth, of his actual, constant, totally real presence here and now, (mostly in the faces of the vulnerable, the outcast), well then, we can get back to a life where God is in his heaven, but, by golly, we run the world!

Which allows for near trillion dollar military budgets.

Which allows the richest one-percenters to kneel in church without a thought for the folks at the bottom.

Which creates the con artist TV evangelists who promise riches to some of the most vulnerable if only they'll send in their last \$100.

With immortal souls and rotting bodies, we put our money on human rules – with the occasional polite nod to the rules of heaven.

But that is not our faith.

Jesus sets in motion a revolution!

It's the revolution of the Kingdom of God – invading our world!

Like the mustard weed invading the garden.

Like yeast forcing the dough to grow.

The revolution of Jesus means that God's ways are replacing our ways.

That our best thinking is finally exposed for the shallow sham that it is.

That in the resurrection of Jesus, raised into a transformed body from the grave, in him, the sacred and the profane embrace and heaven and earth, kiss.

It's God's stunning promise that one day we too shall be raised from our graves!

That these bodies are the seeds of something new, something unimaginably glorious!

This is our faith!

This is our hope!

This is our destiny!

Thanks be to God!

+amen