

Honest and Unflinching

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 5/19/19

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Wausaukee, WI

How's your Easter Season going? Easter Sunday was great with the anthems and the Easter crowd. The next Sunday was the choir hit it out of the park with the Cantata, "The Creation." And then Abby Von Ruden did a wonderful job in sharing with everyone about her Mission Trip to Texas.

I want you to think about something for a moment. On the Monday mornings, when you woke up and got ready for school or for work or to go through your list of daily chores after each of these wonderful experiences, and you opened up the newspaper or logged on online, did it still feel like Easter to you? Were you still humming Alleluias and proclaiming "The Lord is risen!"?

Or when the alarm went off the next day and you got up to face the world, had the Easter message already worn thin? Did you catch yourself plunging headfirst back into the reality of the death toll from the church bombings in Sri Lanka, or the constant commentary about the Mueller report, or, as of last night, the news of yet another act of hate in another synagogue perpetrated by another white man who holds the ideology of white nationalism?

Do you feel like this Easter season, happened so long ago? Sometimes, doesn't it feel as though there is a huge distance between what we feel in worship and what happens during the rest of the week?

I think that's exactly what the disciples felt on that first Easter evening. Things with Jesus had been going so well up until that week. His entrance into Jerusalem had been picture perfect—a wonderful counterprotest to the imperial parade. But by Friday, he was dead. Nailed to a cross. Put into a tomb.

And even after Mary Magdalene testified to the other disciples about seeing the risen Jesus face-to-face, they were still not convinced. They were so deep into the pit of despair that they could not believe her proclamation. So they hid out behind locked doors.

We have something to learn from Thomas and his unflinching honesty, his refusal to believe without fighting for it. Frankly, I find his witness of struggle wonderfully freeing. I hope our confirmands do too. For on this past Monday morning, after the Easter shine had faded and I realized life continued on, I found myself asking, "What on earth is going on in this world, in our country? Why does it always look like Good Friday is still in charge?"

You must have those moments too, right?

The witness of Thomas and others in our scripture shows us that being completely forthright about our sense of disorientation and deep struggle for faith is OK. Actually, let's take that a step further: their witness of struggle shows us it is not just OK, it is also faithful.

Frankly, I believe their witness shows us that that kind of honesty, that kind of deep struggle, might even be necessary in order to fully live as resurrection people.

Remember what Presbyterian preacher Frederick Buechner has said: If you do not have doubts, you are either kidding yourself or you are asleep."

We live in a world where evil still exists—what happened yesterday in Sri Lanka, or Colorado or California or this week in Appleton, Wisconsin are just a few more examples where suffering and pain continue to reign. So if we find that we never struggle or wrestle for faith, we might wonder if we are kidding ourselves or asleep.

But Buechner also writes something else about doubts. He writes that doubts are ants in the pants of faith. They keep us moving. They keep us awake. They keep us from getting lazy without faith. When we are honest about our painful times, those moments of struggle can become, in time, life-giving and

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faith-defining.

Thomas would testify to that experience. Some of our confirmands would say the same. Jesus laid it all out pretty clearly—Notice that Jesus did not scold him and say, “How dare you not believe.” Instead, he held out his hands and said, “Peace, Thomas. Touch my wounds. Move from unbelieving into believing.”

Thomas was brutally honest about his struggle to believe and to trust, and our risen Lord met him in that struggle. Though we do not know whether Thomas followed through with touching the wounds, we do know that something happened, because immediately after Jesus met him where he was, Thomas cried out with the strongest faith confession of any of them: “My Lord, and my God.” He moved from being fear-shaped, into being hope-shaped, Easter-shaped.

This is part of the biblical promise. This is the resurrection relationship to which we are all invited—all invited by the Crucified and Risen One who meets us wherever we are, sees us for all of who we are, and loves us fiercely into our Easter future, never giving up on us, never letting us go. Amen.