

Last week, Mary and a few of the disciples went to the tomb AFTER Mary reported to them that the body was missing. We spent time with Mary. Remember, she stayed at the tomb and wept and Jesus was there to comfort her.

The disciples went back home and locked themselves in a room. This week, we are with them and see what type of action Jesus gives them and then what their reaction is back to him.

There is one disciple that is missing and that disciple is Thomas. We are not exactly where he is at or what he is doing, but he is not there. It is intriguing that he gets labeled Doubting and we will get to that later, but he is not locked up behind a door.

Before we get to the locked room, let us reflect briefly on last week. It was Easter. I had many of you share with me how much you love Easter and it is one of your favorite days of the year. That was not the case for the disciples. The empty tomb, at that moment, was not a sign of resurrection. The empty tomb filled them with disappointment and fear and those emotions gripped them and that is what led them to the locked room.

The locked doors do not deter Jesus. That Easter evening, Jesus appears and stands in front of the disciples. Can you imagine what must be running through their head? I think their fear had to escalate at first. These disciples abandoned Jesus. Jesus died a horrendous death, alone. I have always wondered what was going through their minds, especially Peter. Peter turned his back on Jesus and denied him three times. Jesus had died and now Jesus is standing in front of him. For those fleeting moments, he had to be scared what was going to come out of the mouth of Jesus.

What were those words?

Peace be with you.

Jesus, amidst their fear, gives them peace and the Spirit to go out. One of the first acts that they do that we are witnesses to is sharing the good news with Thomas. Thomas did not believe the news. He just did not believe that the disciples truly saw the risen Lord. Jesus showed the disciples his wounds. Thomas wanted to see the same. Thus, the name doubting Thomas.

When I step back and take a look at this text, there are two things that stand out to me. One, even though the disciples saw Jesus, they are still behind locked doors when Jesus comes back the second time. The other thing that stands out to me is that Thomas is still with the disciples. The disciples did not kick him out because of his non-belief, they allowed him to continue the journey with them. Many times, we, in the church are not that kind.

I think that we, just like the early disciples are dealing with pain, wounds and trauma; just like the early disciples. Our trauma and pain might be for a different reason but it still exists AND I am here to tell you that Jesus still stands with us amidst our pain and say **Peace be with You**. If your heart is wounded and troubled, please note that Jesus is here to bring you comfort and peace.

As I was studying for this sermon, I was reminded of the words from Nathan Nettleton. He shares that many individuals have a misconception about doubt and faith in his opinion. He believes too many people believe they have to be put together to follow God and have a rock-solid, no-doubt belief system. That is the furthest from the truth. Faith in Jesus is simply about following him. We throw our lot to him and go where ever he leads. Jesus was not threatened by doubts and we as a church should be as well. We should and need to be about inviting others into our story.

I am not going to rest in the Acts readings every week because I want us to explore some of the other text. But, if you are listening into the daily readings, you will hear the stories. If you have not been listening in to the daily readings, I want to encourage you to do so. They are on our YouTube and Facebook page

daily. One of the reasons that I am doing the readings comes out of what we see in Acts, one of the components of corporate existence is learning.

When we take a step back and look at the book of Acts from a 30,000-foot view, we see a collection of stories. These stories share an amazing vision of community and mutual care. The early church turned the empire upside down.

I really believe that there are individuals that are searching and yearning for churches that are turning the empire upside down today. The individuals, many unnamed, in the book of Acts had a tremendous heart for their community. They were willing to take risks for their neighbors. Their concern was deep and they wanted to make sure that their neighbors needs were met.

The holy spirit in the first century pulled the church community together. In their coming together, they participated in one another's lives and then came together corporately to worship, learn, share and serve.

We see the story of Acts, mainly about belonging.

Friends, I think that we all want to belong. Especially as we see the light at the end of the pandemic and have been through 14 months of separation in many areas, we want somewhere to hang our hat, somewhere to belong, somewhere that we are loved.

The church can and should be the place.

The Acts passages of Acts 2 and Acts 4 can be challenging for us; especially when we read words like, the members of the church did not claim private ownership of any possessions. The heart of it though was this belonging. Everyone belongs.

William James Jennings goes maybe one step further. He shares that this was not simply about mutual concern, but about mutual identity. This identity is formed in Christ and his new life.

So, here is my challenge to you. Let's make Bay View this type of place. When we look at each other; we have a mutual identity with one another, so we want to make sure that everyone belongs. Then, let us create a culture that occurred in the books of Acts. Let us be a place where we worship together, learn together, share together and serve together.

Amen