

“Hi this is George.” (name changed for privacy) The phone call woke me. Something rang a bell but I couldn’t quite place the voice. Remind me how I know you? “The atheist guy”, said the voice. George was calling to alert me to a fraudulent text requesting gift cards in the name of a pastor, which was helpful, but not the intriguing part of the call. George describes himself as an atheist, but he has not given up on God. He consistently reaches out to clergy with his doubts and questions, he is consistently searching, and his searching sharpens those to whom he addresses his questions. When I’ve asked what it is that keeps him asking the questions, keeps him searching, George says it is the COMMUNITIES of faith and how they are different from the community at large. In other words, the community of faith is where George experiences the evidence of things not seen, but hoped for. We are the testimony to the risen Christ for George who wants to believe, but has lots and lots of questions. If we are honest with George and ourselves, some of those questions come from seeing where the Christian community falls short, but it is also where the light of Christ is evident. This is what keeps George interested and engaged. It is those places and spaces where people love Jesus and love one another that the risen Christ is evident.

I think that's what Thomas was looking for. Isn't it possible that's why Thomas wasn't in the room with the disciples when the risen Christ first appeared to the frightened followers? Thomas was the one who, when hearing of Lazarus' death and Jesus' decision to go to Lazarus despite the inherent danger of returning there, Thomas volunteered to die for Jesus' sake. Later, when Jesus said he would be leaving the disciples, and not just for a short time, Thomas was the first to cry out, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Thomas understood the earth shaking news of Jesus' absence. Thomas was also present when Jesus gave a directive to the disciples in that Upper Room where Jesus had washed the disciples feet, and then fed them the strange meal of the bread and cup representing his body and blood. Jesus gave them this directive:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed

you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”¹

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it²

What if the reason Thomas wasn't in the Upper Room for the first appearance of Christ was that he believed Jesus and was out trying to bear fruit, trying to love, but doing it all alone. What if Thomas was the one who had been trying to get his frightened friends to come along, leave the room and go do the “greater works” but couldn't get them to go? What if Thomas' words of unless I put my hand on the mark of the nails and in his side were words of

¹ . (John 15:12-17)

² (John 14:11-15)

exasperation with his dear friends who stayed holed up and hovering in the upper room. What if he had a hard time believing they had seen the risen Christ because they weren't acting any differently; he wasn't seeing the power of the resurrection in their actions?

The scripture story tells us that a whole week passes before Jesus appears to them when Thomas was present. A whole week? Did it take a week because Thomas was out and about trying to do things on his own? Does Thomas actually serve as the foil for Jesus' message since the rest of the disciples who actually SAW the risen Christ are STILL hanging out in the upper room? The scripture story doesn't say that Thomas ever touches Jesus when he appears...it says that his response is "My Lord and my God". A response that is consistent with how Thomas responded to Jesus before the resurrection. What if Jesus' words are a reminder to us, just as they were an admonishment to those in the upper room, that there will be times when it seems we cannot see the risen Christ at work in the world, but to not lose hope? What if these words are to remind us that the risen Christ is among us and that when we work together as followers of Jesus, believing in resurrection power, we will in fact do the works that Jesus did ... and even greater works.

Beloveds this is the potential and the power of our congregations and all that each of our churches is doing in our communities...even more so is the potential of our South Sound Cooperative. What could that resurrection power look like with our churches working with and supporting one another? I don't pretend to have specific proposals, many of you have been at this cooperative venture for quite some time. You've seen different iterations of the cooperative. But, I can tell you, that there is a hope and a desire by many to see us collectively be the bearers of lasting fruit as a South Sound Cooperative. And if there's a little voice in your head that says "but we're all so different", I say to that YES! And Hallelujah! That difference is to be celebrated! Think about how different those disciples were...some of them would have preferred to kill each other in another context...a tax collector and a zealot learning to love one another?? Think of the ways they had wounded one another before they were brought together by Jesus.

And maybe those wounds are part of the story...an important part. When the resurrected Jesus appeared, he bore the scars of his wounds. Maybe that's part of the story for us. Our wounds don't get the final word. Being healed doesn't mean that our scars disappear. Jesus even tells Thomas to touch them.

What if healing doesn't necessarily mean that wounds completely disappear. What if the reality of resurrection maybe means that the healing of those wounds and their visibility allows them to be something that brings resurrection living to others. Christ's resurrection transforms wounds and scars into something that testifies to the **power** of resurrection. It may be that the ache of the wound returns from time to time, but that doesn't mean that you're void of faith or that the power of Christ is not in you. We don't get through life without being wounded and bearing scars. Jesus knows what it is to be wounded and scarred. He knows what it is to have his followers doubt that they, that we, can do together the works that Jesus did and far greater works than Jesus did. But he also knows the power of resurrection.

It is the power of the resurrected Christ that got the disciples to leave the Upper Room. They headed out together. And so will we.

They left to bring food to the hungry. **And so will we.**

They left to clothe the naked. **And so will we.**

They left to give the thirsty drink...**And so will we.**

They left to welcome the stranger...**And so will we.**

They left to care for the sick...**And so will we.**

They left to visit the prisoners....**And so will we.**

They left to live in resurrection power...**And so will we.**

They left to show Christ's love to everyone...**And so will we.**

May it be so. Amen.