

And the Scars to Prove It...

John 20:19-31; Acts 5:27-32

The rewards of faith are not always in a hurry.

Jesus took His time getting back to the disciples, while Thomas was still remaining a part of the eleven. It took Jesus a week to get back to the disciples, and thus present Himself on His own time, for the examination of the apostle Thomas.

And Jesus still has not come back to show Himself to us, at least in ways that fulfill rational substantiation. **So we might well consider ourselves amongst the ones that Jesus said will be “those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”** But something has convinced us to be here amongst the community of saints, when most of the world regularly has something else to do on Sunday morning.

What has convinced us, without having seen the Risen Christ up close and personal?

What has convinced you?

For one, **my guess you were not argued into the faith.** That is, your commitment to being a participant in the community of saints was not one of assenting to a series of logical propositions that left you with no reasonable alternative but to accept that Jesus is the Risen Lord. That might have worked for you. But I think it is relatively rare.

Another way might be that **some people have been scared into the faith.** Enter the famous fire and brimstone kinds of preaching. At the end of some of those sermons the listener yearns to walk the sawdust trail in the hopes of escaping what God would be most unhappy with. Scared into heaven one might say. It has been effective for many people of the Christian experience. For many, but in universal perspective, rare. Certainly putting the fear of God in people seems more newsworthy.

Still another way, that is not threatening, or logically deduced may be **the promise of personal success and notoriety if one professes to follow Jesus** as the Lord of one's life. That is, following Jesus and doing the kinds of things that lead to success and financial comfort must be a tantalizing approach to believe. Of course, the whole idea is that once your prosperity is augmented in undeniable ways, it will be easier to believe in God, ie. you can't argue with success. Some critics will call this the prosperity Gospel, which by its very nature provides hidden pitfalls.

All three of these ways have their adherents and certainly their proponents. And so we understand that discipleship in Christ with the love and service of the neighbor, the least, last and lost that is the desired end, so we are careful in our critiques of the above approaches.

And yet, **perhaps the more faithful and longer-lasting approach is found in the text itself about how Thomas came to his remarkable statement of faith.** For it was not just the sight of His face, or the gait of His walk. Rather it would be the scars that would convince Him.

And even though the selection from the Gospel of John doesn't really tell us, it seems that Thomas didn't have to touch Jesus at all. It was the sight of the battle scars, if you will, that led him to find secure belief. Only Jesus would have those particular marks. They were the evidence of His faithfulness. Easter always carries scars.

But he is not the only one with scars. **His disciples would get theirs,** as various traditional accounts of their lives henceforward would tell.

And we have our own marks of faithfulness.

No, we don't have the scars of Jesus, complete with holes in our side, wrists and feet, but **we have noticed the scars of those around us who have fought the good fight of faith**, and continue the discipline of service and peace. And so we believe. Not that we broadcast our struggles or invite people to ask about our marks, our aches and pains, even though the love of rehearsing becomes sweeter by the day.

Rather, having been together long enough, **we have demonstrated who we believe in**, though we have not seen Him. We have the marks of the journey. As the hymn *Blest Be The Tie That Binds* (No.306, *Glory to God, the Presbyterian Hymnal*), certainly says:

*We share our mutual woes; our mutual burdens bear.
And often for each other flow the sympathizing tear.*

Along with that poetic affirmation, we are patient with those who are earning their stripes, their own scars, or those who have grown weary in hanging on to the promises of Him. The work of faith and belief becomes a fellowship driven act. Scars, burdens, forbearance, patience...all wrapped up into this work we call faith.

A recent commentator wrote about dealing with his mother who had been a pillar of faith and discipleship when she was younger in the lives of him and his brother, but now was in the later stages of dementia. He writes:

Our faith has never been about her faith or my faith. If in the end faith was about what "I believe," then it would be up to me to end life with a peak of inspiration and theological insight. But what if we peak sooner than our years endure? What if at the end we are not as much as we used to be? What if we need someone else to hold our memories of grace before our years of failure run out? Over the years, as a pastor, I've lost track of how many times I have taken communion to people with some form of dementia. What does it mean to "do this in remembrance of me" when someone has run out of remembrances? It means the memory of Christ can never be contained by the mental capacities of any of its members. Sometimes the community of faith holds the memories of saving grace for us. It's not that different when a congregation vows in a worship service to hold the faith for an infant that was just baptized. Then we are waiting for the child to grow into belief. At the other end of life, we're receiving the faith back from those whose memories are too worn out to hold their belief. The great faith belongs to the church, and we're always holding it for someone. (p.35, *Christian Century*, April 10 2019).

Scars, weariness, doubts, memories and all...shared together, for even Thomas knew to stick with the eleven.

Hence maybe that is why we have seen, and because of each other, have come to believe.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.