

Reflection “Believing without seeing”

By Rev. Dr Fei Taulealeausumai

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What are some of the things that we believe in without needing to see in order to be convinced of its truth or reality? At the time of the moon landing in 1969 many people or the conspiracy theorists claimed that some or all elements of the Apollo program and the associated Moon landings were hoaxes staged by NASA, possibly with the aid of other organizations. The most notable claim is that the six crewed landings (1969–1972) were faked and that twelve Apollo astronauts did not actually walk on the Moon. Various groups and individuals have made claims since the mid-1970s that NASA and others knowingly misled the public into believing the landings happened, by manufacturing, tampering with, or destroying evidence including photos, radio and TV transmissions, and Moon rock samples. It was televised, people saw it and yet some still not believe.

On that Easter morning according to Mark’s recollection, the women were sent away to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, they did not see a body, but they believed without seeing. In John’s gospel Mary recognised Jesus who she earlier thought was the gardener and she cried out Rabboni and tried to hold on to him. She believed after seeing.

Even though it was only Mary who witnessed Jesus in the flesh Mark’s gospel has the other women going along with Mary to tell that Jesus had been risen from the dead. They did not need to see in order to believe they believed without seeing.

When Jesus first appeared to his disciples, they saw his wounds, Thomas was not present at that time. I wonder why he was not there, where was he? It is possible that he was AWOL absent without leave because he was still coming to terms with Jesus' death. He was separated from the other disciples for a week. Most of us know that sometimes when we are grieving the death of a loved one, we need our space and for many of us it takes longer than others to grieve, we all grieve differently and for some of us it takes much longer. A week later when Thomas joins the disciples, they tell him what had happened when Jesus appeared to them and Thomas responded, "unless I see the wounds in his hands and put my finger in his side, I will not believe". Jesus suddenly appeared again in front of them again and this time Thomas was present, and when he saw Jesus' wounds, he exclaimed My Lord and my God, he believed because he saw. Jesus said you only believe because you see, how happy are those who believe even though they have not seen.

Thomas has often been portrayed over the centuries as "doubting Thomas" because of his words "unless I see the nail wounds in his hands and feet and put my finger in those wounds and touch his side I will not believe". He is one of 12 disciples, yet I personally think that Thomas articulated the doubt of probably the majority of other disciples who remained silent. Usually, the one who speaks the loudest is painted with the brush of doubt whereas those who remained silent were probably saying the very same words over and over in their heads but hadn't built up the courage to actually put their thoughts into words.

It is possible that Jesus could have miraculously obliterated his wounds after he was raised from the tomb but chose not to. He bore the marks of his wounds into the presence of his disciples. It was these wounds that Thomas wanted to see and touch. Wounds are important in the same way Jesus does not expect us to hide our wounds either all of us carry around wounds and scars from our own crucifixions, Henril Nouwen calls these wounds the wounded healer.

We are all wounded healers, we become wounded healers when in our own journeys from brokenness to becoming whole we come to recognise and acknowledge our own vulnerability, our limitations, and our fragility as humans. Our scars are not necessary all physical, we also have the battle scars, the wounds from being misrepresented and misunderstood, misquoted, and misjudged and so part of our process of healing is that of justice seeking and empowerment.

A ministry of wholeness comes out of our striving to seek wholeness amidst the brokenness. That every piece of broken pottery that smashes into hundreds of pieces is important, each has a story to tell without which the original product is incomplete.

The risen Christ came to his disciples in the midst of their turmoil and fear; they were having a major crisis. He came in the midst of their doubt and their sense of having failed both him and their own selves and said to them: "Peace be with you."

When in our humanness we give in to doubt, we are not cut off from the love or strength of God; we're offered the same chance as Thomas to experience the reality of God's love. Because in the community of faith, we are always accepted

at God's communion table and in the company of our fellow believers or our fellow doubters. We're all in this together.

So, maybe we should stop labeling Thomas as "doubting Thomas" and be grateful to him for showing us that it's OK to question and that it's perfectly normal to have doubts.

This particular congregation is full of individuals who have all walked the road of doubt and we come with lots of questions about the so-called truths we were fed as Christians in much more conservative evangelical upbringings. Many of us have chosen St. Andrew's as a worshipping community because it meets us where we are at, it allows us to both affirm and to doubt, it allows us to sit with our questions and our challenges. We may not have the answers to all our questions, but we are here because we are happy to explore this and walk the journey of discovery together.

But we should also learn from our own stories that, as a community, we have the responsibility to share the experiences we've had and to be a strength to each other and to those around us.

We too find Christ in our community. His vulnerability can be found in everyone around us, in children and in the elderly, his courage in those who stand bravely for principle or who accept suffering with dignity. His kindness shines forth in the smiles of others, his healing power in their gentle touch. We also meet him in the weak and the vulnerable; we meet the vulnerable Jesus in ourselves as well. Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds. He extends that same invitation to us.

And when he said this, he showed them his wounds - the holes in his hands and in his side - as if to say: See these wounds - feel them and know that it is all right to hurt. Pain comes to us all – we have all been hurt in one way or another in our lives – Jesus’ wounds says to us that that pain and that hurt no longer has dominion over him - he lived as he said he would. Jesus’ wounds remind us that he said he would suffer - and that we, if we followed him, would also suffer. Our suffering although real and very painful through Christ and because of Christ no longer has dominion over us.

“On the evening of that first day of the week,” Jesus also granted his disciples the power to forgive. Forgiveness may be as difficult to understand, as it is to practice. The cliché “forgive and forget” is misleading. We are not really expected to forget, to overlook offenses as if they had never happened. That would be naïve, and it might suggest that committing an offense against another is not really so bad. The Greek word *Metanoia* means “true repentance” or genuine forgiveness. It is a forgiveness that seeks forgiveness from those we have wronged. It acknowledges that even if we might have found Jesus in wilderness time or even in our prison cell after whatever crime we may have committed we still need to seek forgiveness from the person whom we have wronged if our penitence is genuine *metanoia*. When we acknowledge our wrongs not just to God but seek forgiveness from the one, we have wronged, only then can forgiveness transform not only ourselves but the person we have wronged. Christ’s forgiveness believes in transformation. In fact, the act of forgiveness can itself be transformative.

Jesus extended his forgiving peace to his disciples and then gave them the power to extend that same forgiving peace to others.

The troubling times in which we live remind us that we are all in need of forgiveness. We are either perpetrators of some offense against another or we harbor resentment and animosity toward the offender.

There might even be times when, like Thomas, we have to forgive ourselves.

What we need are opened eyes that can recognize the risen Lord in our midst and willing hearts that will enable others to encounter Christ through us. Peace be with you. Amen.