

## Doubting Thomas

John 20:19-31

I recently finished a book by Anthony Doerr called, "All the Light we Cannot See." He won a Pulitzer Prize so it's obviously pretty well written. The story takes place during the Nazi occupation in France. One of the main protagonists is a young French blind girl, Marie Laure, and the other a young German engineering prodigy called Werner. Marie Laure was sighted as a young child but there was a degenerative problem and somehow they knew she would eventually go blind. So her father, a locksmith and museum curator, built her a very detailed model of their neighborhood in Paris, including park benches, bumps in the road, sign posts. And he patiently takes her out to a new spot everyday and goes with her without saying a word until she can find her own way back to their home. At first, of course it's terrifying but eventually she masters it and knows exactly how many streets and curbs, and using her cane she navigates like a pro.

Meanwhile in Germany, Werner lives at a children's home after his father dies in a coal mining collapse. He is fascinated with electronics which in that time was pretty limited to radio and he manages to take a

discarded radio and repair it McGyver style using various bicycle parts. And it has such a range that he picks up a mysterious radio broadcast from France, one that seems to target children with creative science lessons mixed with classical music. One night in his feathery, accented French he talks about light. "The brain is locked in total darkness, of course, children, says the voice. It floats in a clear liquid inside the skull, never in the light. And yet the world it constructs in the mind is full of light. It brims with color and movement. So how, children, does the brain, which lives without a spark of light, build for us a world full of light? And he goes on to talk about how coal is made and how sunlight 100 million years old is heating their homes that night.

The gospel story today is a well known one we hear every year the week after Easter. It's rich with significance and meaning. Jesus appears to all but two of the disciples with a common everyday Jewish greeting, Peace be with you! Then in an act that precludes Pentecost he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, and sends them with the specific instructions to forgive as they have been forgiven. It's also how poor Thomas gets the label he has had for centuries of Doubting Thomas. Ironically he is later martyred for his faith in India, but that story rarely gets told. And he doesn't even doubt Jesus, he doubts the

words of his peers, his buddies that a dead man came into a locked house. He was the one who ventured out while they were afraid for their lives and hiding inside behind locked doors. He had the courage to go out and when he did see Jesus and Jesus offers to have him touch his wounds, it doesn't actually say that he did. He proclaims My Lord, my God, not teacher, not messiah but my Lord and My God.

Jesus didn't have to come back just for Thomas, why would he do that just because Thomas wants proof? There must be more to it

At some point writing most sermons there is an uncomfortable spot where I think yeah, let me just stand up here and tell you the mind of Jesus. There just isn't any amount of education that can prepare me more than anyone else to know the mind of God. Revealing the mind of God is not the intent as much as what God has revealed in the mind of me. Like Leonard Cohen said, everything has cracks in in, that's how the light gets in. I can honestly say my closest encounters with the divine, my moments of greatest clarity and light, have nothing to do with sudden rebuke or ridicule and everything to do with connection and unconditional acceptance. Acceptance that almost predates existence is pretty much it. The guilt, inadequacy, that all comes easily but never seems to be fodder for growth.

Believing that Jesus showed up specifically to let Thomas know he basically failed just doesn't seem right. I didn't fact check him but I heard a sermon from a PhD'd pastor that said the original word for doubt that is used elsewhere is not used in this passage. So see right here, when someone doesn't verify we question their intelligence rather than praise their faith. Thomas wanted to verify his peers, not Jesus. So it's rather conditional Thomas, he says if certain conditions are not met, he will certainly not believe. We replicate this folly every time we decide we will believe when certain demands are met. The key is Jesus' response. Don't be unbelieving but believing. Jesus puts faith into Thomas with his presence. My sense is Thomas knows he is in God's presence before Jesus speaks a word. He says blessed are they who do not see and still believe. Do not be unbelieving but believing. Sight goes way beyond the eye's ability to see and the hands to touch. Sight goes inside as well as outside. With just the human mind we can see so much light without venturing out of a dark room, a dark cell, the dead of night, the deepest and darkest despair. That's where the good news hits home for me in this passage. When the world starts to control our behavior more than the risen Christ, when we retreat into despair, we believe no one will follow us. We believe no one can find us and there Christ finds us, there in the locked cell

of despair the risen Christ enters and as surely as we have not seen a physical body or touched its wounds, we believe in the presence of the risen Christ.

The response to the resurrection is to live by forgiveness. Anne Lamott says earth is forgiveness school and grace is spiritual WD40. Grace finds you exactly as you are, but doesn't leave you as it found you. When we hold on to transgressions, our own or someone else's, it leads to despair, it keeps us in the heavy spaces. To live in faith requires the mindset of forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn't change the past but it surely changes the future.

Marie Laure and Werner follow different paths, yet are connected in miraculous ways. Werner works to be accepted at a Nazi school. He sees it as a way out for him and his sister, a way to get the best education. He has no idea where that will lead or the terrors he will face until the light breaks through and often subtly but intentionally take him in a different direction. They will both take risks beyond what they could imagine at the start.

As for peace, Anne Lamott says peace is joy at rest and joy is peace on its feet. It's both and. The only way to stay locked away is to not engage with the world or with anyone. The only way to see with faith is to be a

lifelong learner at the school of forgiveness. The only way to go in peace is to forgive, to show mercy, to love in the face of overwhelming doom. Anne also says almost everything works again if you just unplug it for a little while. Even us. That's true and I'm all for it. Peace I bring to you and peace I leave with you, in the name of the Risen Lord, Amen