

2 Easter, Year A

Acts 2:14a,22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Do you want to know the truth?

The truth is:

I . . . was . . . crushed.

How could I have missed him?

How could *he* have missed *me*?

“We’ve seen him!” they all yelled at once.

“We’ve seen him! He was here!

He is not dead as we thought!”

“What?” I said. “You guys are crazy.

This is no time for joking.”

But they kept insisting:

“No! We saw him. It was him!”

He looks . . . *different*,

but we know it’s him.

He showed us his hands!

The mark of the nails!

It was him!”

“Boys,” I said, “face facts.

He is dead.

I don’t know what you saw—

or what you *think* you saw—

but it must have been someone else.

It was an impostor.

He . . . is . . . dead,

and we have to move on.

The sooner you realize that,

the better off we’ll be.”

I said all that,

but the truth is . . .

I was crushed.

What if they were right?

What if he wasn’t dead?

What if *they* had all gotten to see him,
and *I* missed the one and only opportunity?
I loved him *so* much—
I was *so* loyal—
and *I* missed out?
Why didn't he come to *me*?

All my life since then,
people have called me
“Doubting Thomas,”
but my problem wasn't that I didn't believe.
Oh, I believed.
I believed just enough to be hurt
that he came to all of them,
but he did not come to me.
I believed enough to feel unlucky,
unworthy,
unloved . . .
crushed.

I have always been
a concrete kind of guy.
I say “concrete,”
but I don't mean a blockhead like Peter.
That guy never thought anything through.
(And by the way—
as long as we're talking, just you and me—
it has always irked me
that I got stuck for all history
with the name “Doubting Thomas”
while they call Peter
the “Prince of the Apostles!”
Really?!
You know, Peter doubted too.
In fact, he denied Jesus . . . three times!
I love the guy,
but don't even get me started.)

No, I say I'm a concrete kind of guy
because I like to *think things through*.
When Jesus would give us a hard teaching,
I wouldn't shy away.
I'd ask questions.
I'd try to understand.

Before he died, he told us,
“You know the place to where I’m going,”
but I piped up and said
what everyone else was thinking
but lacked the courage to ask.
“Lord,” I said,
“we *don’t* know where you’re going.
How can we know the way?”
And I’ll never forget what he said.
He said, “*I am* the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.”
Thank God I asked, right?

Or what about that time
when he set his face toward Bethany and Jerusalem
to go heal our friend Lazarus,
knowing that the authorities
were out to get him
and would probably be there
waiting to arrest him?
No one else wanted to go,
but *I* said, “Let us also go,
that we may die with him.”
I loved him.
I was committed to him.

So when the day came
that Peter, John, Mary and everyone else
started saying,
“He’s back! He’s back!
We’ve seen him! He’s back!”
I thought, “There’s no way.”
Say he *was* still alive . . .
How could he do that to me?
How could he come see all of them,
and not come find me?

So I looked them in the eye,
and I told them, “Nope.
Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,
and put my finger in the marks
and my hand in his side,
I will not believe.”

A week went by,
and every day was pure agony because
they acted as though nothing was wrong,
as though we hadn't just been
through the worst ordeal of our lives.
They were all so full of . . . *hope*.
But me?
I just sat, quiet,
and tried not to spoil their party.

But then . . .
well, you know the story.
To this day, I still can't really explain it.
I was just about fed up with them,
when all of a sudden,
there he was.
There he was!

And they were *right* . . .
there was definitely
something *different* about him.
Some had said
he didn't look like himself anymore,
but I wouldn't put it that way.
To me he looked *more himself*
than he ever had before,
if that makes any sense.
He looked . . . *alive*.

And the first word
that came from his mouth?
"Peace . . .
peace be with you."

Even those words
were somehow more real,
more alive,
more than just words;
and they melted my heart.

All that confusion,
all that anxiety,
all that second-guessing and self-loathing
that had gripped my heart and my gut
all week long . . .

it all melted
like thin wax
in a hot flame.

And then,
as though he already knew
what I said the week before,
he looked at me and said,
“Thomas:
Put your finger here.
See my hands.
Reach out your hand.
Put it in my side.
Believe.”

The thing is,
I didn’t even have to.
He had me at
“Peace be with you.”
I *knew* it was him.
I *knew* he came back for me.
I *knew* that all my commitment
for all those years
was not in vain.

And all I could manage
through the hot tears in my eyes
and the round lump in my throat were
five little words:
“My Lord and my God.”

You know, after some time
I’ve come to realize the great truth of all of this,
and it is a simple one.
The truth is that God—
our God, the Risen Christ—
will always meet you where you are.

Isn’t that how he came to Mary?
She loved him so fiercely.
He had freed from her demons
and restored her to life,
and oh those long talks they used to have!
She needed someone to call her name,
and that’s exactly what he did.

“Mary,” he said in that garden,
and she knew.

And Peter?
I give Peter a hard time,
but Jesus knew exactly what Peter needed.
Peter needed a second chance.
After denying Jesus three times,
Peter needed to know that all was reconciled,
all was forgiven.
“Peter, do you love me?
Peter, do you love me?
Peter, do you love me?”
Three denials.
Three second chances.
He knew what Peter needed,
and he met him where he was.

People say what I needed was proof,
but I’m not so sure.
I think what I really needed
was to know that I had not been overlooked.
That I had not been forgotten.
That I was not all alone.

To this day,
they still call me “Doubting Thomas,”
and fine . . .
I’ll own that.
But who here doesn’t doubt?
Who here doesn’t sometimes wonder
if they’re really on the outside looking in?
If maybe God doesn’t really love them
the way they thought he did?
Who here isn’t envious of those
who always seem to get it right,
who have a special connection to God,
who walk through life
like they’ve just had an encounter
with the Risen Christ,
while you sit there thinking,
“But what about me?
What about me, O Lord?”

If that's where you are, don't worry.
He knows what you need,
and he will meet you where you are.
You don't have to have him figured out beforehand.
You don't have to have all the right answers ready to go.
You don't even have to be convinced.

No two people are the same.
However you come to faith,
he understands,
and he will meet you where you are.
He brings the faith to you.

So come.
Come with me,
and Mary,
and that blockhead Peter.
Come and celebrate the Resurrection
with whatever voice you have to lend it.

And as he meets you where you are,
I hope you too
will come to know the concrete joy
of those five little words:

"My Lord and my God!"