

You were there, in the emergency room, with the person you love most in this world lying on a gurney, surrounded by your closest family, machines beeping and then the long flatline sound, and the doctor marking the time of death. You held each other and wept, touched the dear face, kissed the tortured brow, stroked the cooling hand.

And two days later your closest family tell you they have seen your beloved, alive, with their own eyes....

Well mistaken identity happens. A few years ago I was walking down a Brooklyn Street and there, walking ahead of me, about 50 feet away, I saw a woman who looked and walked exactly like Deirdre's mother. Who was in the UK, at the time. I almost called out "Joan!" but then got real and grabbed my cell phone and shot a video and sent it off to Deirdre. Who sent back a message – "Wow! That's Mum! But it can't be!"

Of course it wasn't Mum. A reality check made that abundantly clear.

And that seems to be all Thomas is asking for: a reality check. Because seeing is not always believing. And sometimes believing has no basis in seeing.

The other disciples told Thomas they had seen the Lord, raised from the dead. But all Thomas had seen was the broken body, the fluids gushing from

the side. The last Thomas knew of his beloved friend was the weight of the body he carried into the tomb. The last he had heard was the sound of the stone being rolled across the tomb's entrance.

Do you believe everything anyone tells you? Do you believe everything even your most trusted friends tell you?

Unless, Thomas said, I "put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas wasn't questioning Jesus. Thomas wasn't even questioning the report of the other disciples. What Thomas questioned was the reliability of sight. And as it turns out, that was very astute of him.

Things are not always as they seem. Time and again witnesses to the Resurrected Jesus do not recognize him by sight. Mary didn't see Jesus – she saw a gardener; until he spoke her name. The other disciples, gathered together in that locked room, on that first day of resurrection, didn't recognize Jesus by the way his face looked. He had to show them his wounds. Jesus accompanied disciples all the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but they didn't recognize him until he lifted his hands and intoned the words of blessing over bread.

Thomas loved Jesus. Thomas loved Jesus with a hard-nosed, practical, fierce love. Thomas was there among the disciples, in the Temple's Portico of Solomon, when Jesus barely missed being stoned to death. They all escaped by a judicious retreat across the Jordan to where John had baptized. When

Jesus says, on hearing of the death of Lazarus, Let's go back to Judea, the other disciples protest. Thomas, always the realist, recognizing a lost cause, says "Let's us go too and die with him." Friends don't let friends get stoned alone.

Thomas loves Jesus so much he is willing to die with him. In fact, it sounds like Thomas doesn't think life is much worth living without Jesus in it.

Is that why Thomas wasn't with the disciples on that first day of Resurrection? Where was Thomas that morning and that evening? The first report from Mary and Peter and the other disciple was just that the tomb was empty, the body was gone. The body whose wounds he had seen, whose weight he had carried into that tomb, was gone. His most beloved friend had gone out of this world, and now even the lifeless shell no longer remained.

Thomas is the realist. Thomas is the logistics disciple. When Jesus says he will prepare a fine place for the disciples to join him, Thomas points out they have no idea where he is going so how are they supposed to get there? So Thomas is out doing something practical, probably. Perhaps he has gone off to their friends in high places to see if he can find any trace of the body of his Lord. Maybe he's gone to servants' quarters to see if he can learn anything from the people who usually know most about what's really going on. Maybe he has gone to Bethany to Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Or maybe his sense

of abandonment is too acute to hang around with people who think there might be some hope, and he has gone back to that garden in the Kidron Valley, the place where he was last with the living Lord, wrestling by himself with a grief too great to contain, too raw to share.

We cannot know why Thomas wasn't there in that locked room with the other disciples that first evening. But most of us know how it feels to not be there for something momentous and unexpected, especially after two years of Covid. We can't believe it's happened. We are angry with ourselves for not being there. We are angry with those we love for letting it happen without us. We're angry with those who were there because – they were there. We're heartbroken.

Thomas comes back after Jesus has gone, and the others tell him what they have seen and heard. And his heart breaks. He didn't have much hope, because after all he's the realist, he's the logistics guy, but he had put all his love and all his faith in the Lord who had never failed him, and he wasn't there when Jesus came among them. And Jesus didn't wait for him.

Now the true strength of Thomas' faith reveals itself. He doesn't turn away from the pain. He doesn't deny the love and the anguish he feels. He doesn't hide the difficulty he's having with all this. He stands up to it. He challenges Jesus to come back, to show himself to **him**, Thomas. Thomas is in the habit

of believing Jesus. Habits are hard to break. Jesus has never failed him, and Thomas will not **let** Jesus fail him now. Thomas knows that mere sight can deceive. Thomas requires more from Jesus. Thomas requires touch, the feel of the nail prints, his hand close to the beating heart of Jesus. The very conditions Thomas sets for believing are evidence of his unassailable faith. Thomas isn't telling the disciples what he needs; he's telling Jesus. And that means he believes that somehow, somewhere, Jesus is listening.

How do we pray when we really believe Jesus is listening? How do we pray when we really believe God is God?

I'm not really feeling resurrection these days. Our Bishop has called us to actively work towards the healing of our earth. But the task seems entirely beyond our strength. The evil of war and tyranny of power and greed seem poised to destroy not only millions of lives and loves and our whole world, but democracy and freedom. Truth seems to hang somewhere between life and death. And there seems precious little I can do about any of it.

Things are not always as they seem. Jesus died. It seemed as though Jesus left us. But God raised Jesus from the dead. And the disciples discovered the Risen Jesus behind the face of a stranger again and again.

We come here to affirm week by week, day by day, minute by minute, that Jesus is still in this world. Jesus is still listening. Jesus is still with us. Jesus is under the rubble of Mariupol and starving with climate refugees. Like the mycelium that permeates the forest floor, Jesus is in the ground of our ravaged earth.

When we look, carefully and with love, at our beautiful world, we may find our beloved Lord. When we look at the face of the stranger, we may find the risen Jesus. Then we are called to reach out and touch his wounds and demand that God help us find ways to bring this world back to life.

And God will do a new thing. And every eye will behold God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.