

Going deeper on Low Sunday (John 20:19-31)

A day with few visitors presents an opportunity.

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The people who come to worship the Sunday after Easter are typically the most stalwart, dedicated churchgoers. They will come back to church no matter what is preached, and they don't need to be won over by clever exegesis or evangelical fervor.

But these are folks who may be longing for something deeper. They may be dedicated to Sunday attendance because it means so very much to them; it may also be because their lives are a bit lonely or empty and church is a crucial touchpoint in their weekly well-being.

If you can offer these folks a word from God this week that is risky and real—something that truly grapples with the story of Thomas and the disciples with more than what a Low Sunday might seem to deserve—you will be feeding these spiritual stalwarts a gospel food that they likely come to church hungry for every week.

If you're a preacher, try to preach a sermon you would never preach on Easter Sunday or any other time when a lot of visitors or spiritual outsiders or beginners are expected—a sermon in which you grapple with the meaning of the resurrection, of faith, or of the person of Jesus more than you would in a 101 or even 201 level sermon.

Here are four pathways I offer for you to consider.

“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear”—what are your people afraid of? What are you afraid of? How are you locking the door these days, physically or spiritually or emotionally?

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't tell the disciples they were wrong to lock the door; he just walks right through the door. What would it be like to pray for Jesus to enter through our locked doors? What is the risk? What might his “Peace be with you” look like on the other side?

“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.” Even in the wake of the resurrection, we must not look away from the wounds of Christ. We are the body of Christ—Christ's wounds are in us and in our neighbors, and yet there are ways we ignore them or look away. What are some wounds in the body of Christ you are aware of in your community? In your town or city?

How can we as Christians look at those wounds and even put our hands out to touch them in a way that honors them? That makes us loving witnesses, not gawkers or pitying observers staying at a distance? How could honoring the wounds of God's people help us be more whole as the body of Christ? Help us know the resurrected Christ more fully? Help us receive the Holy Spirit?

“Do not doubt but believe.” It's not wrong to doubt—in God, in the church, in your fellow disciples, in yourself. Jesus does not scold or condemn Thomas for doubting, for longing for proof. Are there ways you, as the preacher, have longed for proof in your own faith journey? Doubted your faith or the gospel? Invite your listeners to consider this in their own lives.

Jesus does not scold or condemn Thomas for his doubt; instead, Jesus invites Thomas into deeper relationship. Has something like this ever happened to you? Invite the congregation to ponder Jesus' invitation in their own spiritual life. How might Jesus be inviting them to a deeper relationship, even if they find themselves in doubt?

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Most of us have come to believe without seeing. Invite your congregation to consider their own story of coming to belief this Sunday. Share a little about your own journey. Then invite them to reflect on their own. I suggest passing out pieces of paper and

pencils for them to write, or, if your congregation is game for this sort of thing, by sharing with the person next to them.

Ask them to consider: How did you “come to believe”? What did you have to see or touch first? Was there ever a time when you felt like you met Jesus? What were times when you doubted or struggled? How did you come through those times? How do you feel Jesus saying “Peace be with you” in your life right now?