

Resurrection Words: Put Your Finger Here

**Mark 9: 24
John 20: 19-31**

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Seeing is believing.
That's what they say.
And so much of the time, they are right.

We are a people created with bodies, people of the senses.
It is only in the last decades that we are realizing just how true that is for learning.
And only in the last few years are we beginning to appreciate that in the context of worship - that involving seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, moving can help people connect on a deeper level, sometimes, than words alone are capable of doing.

While the mind may try to convince us of something, the body holds back.
Not quite so sure.
Not ready to commit.

And, perhaps, not just the body.
Memory, too, plays a part.

Perhaps we have gone through certain experiences. And perhaps those certain experiences haven't always given us the most favorable outcomes. If someone comes along and invites us to a similar experience, it may well take a lot of convincing to try it again - even when assurances are offered that **this** time everything will be just fine.

Who wants to climb back into a car after an accident?

Who wants to go back to that restaurant after the bad food experience?

Jesus encountered this from time to time in his walk on earth.
Mark 9 tells us about a very sad situation - a desperate father with a demon-possessed child. Together they had experienced much trauma. Terrible fits. Burning. Near drowning. Unpredictable and awful stuff.

He brings the boy to the disciples, who prove to be of zero help.

Then Jesus arrives on the scene and engages the dad.

"If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us!" pleads the man. Jesus said to him, "If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes."

Try to imagine the struggle shouting in the head of the father at that point?
We often race right ahead in our reading of this story, zooming from verse 23 to verse 24.
But stop for a moment.
The experiences.

All those horrible experiences.

So many.

So out of control.

That was reality.

How many of these past experiences do you think flashed through his mind right about there?

And here is the stranger saying, "Believe."
Remember the anguished response?

"I believe; help my unbelief!"

Wanting the best.

And yet -

reality, friend, reality.

Can't ignore what is staring you in the face.

Terrible tension.

The same sort of tension that faced the disciple Thomas on the eve of Easter Sunday.

Let's read that account together:

JOHN 20:19-31, p.115 (New Testament)

Here, like the account in Mark 9, we the reader are often guilty of moving too fast. And pre-judging what the outcome should be.

Know what part of the Easter story is often
overlooked,
zoomed past,
not factored in?

Saturday.

The horribly silent and dark time between Friday afternoon's execution and burial, and Easter morning's triumphant encounter.

Dark Saturday.

Every minute that crawled past making the loss even larger.

Every hour that dragged on making the reality that evil and death had won ever more final.

Saturday -

Numb with grief.

Wet with tears.

Weighed with despair.

The disciples were shocked out of Saturday by the personal appearance of Jesus. First a few. Some of them one-on-one. And then the group.

The tears are wiped away.

The grief sublimates.

Giddy joy and relief push away the despair.

They see the hands and the feet of Jesus.

They hear his voice.

They feel his breath.

But Thomas doesn't.

Thomas is stuck in Saturday.

Stuck in his sorrow.

Stuck in the tragedy and pain.

No wonder he can only manage a rough remark when the others come to him with the good news.
News?

More of a pathetic joke.

Reality, man, reality.

Seeing and experiencing is believing.

And so he responds.

Words, alone, are not enough to lift him out of the horrible things he'd been part of.

Now, don't see Thomas short.
He's not some spiritual whimper.
Far from it.

The first time we really hear about Thomas is in John 11. It's the story of Lazarus, the friend of Jesus. Lazarus falls deathly ill, and word is sent to Jesus. Who delays his return. Eventually he prepares to return. And Thomas says to the other disciples, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" (Jn 11:16).

Those words don't come out of the blue. They are deliberate words. Thomas knew that the Jewish leaders were desperate in their desire to shut Jesus down. He also knew that to this point they had been unable to do so. However, Lazarus' home was in a village just outside of Jerusalem. They'd be going right into the lion's den, so to speak.

Thomas knows the situation. He understands the risks. He weighs them out. Names them for what they are. And, given all that, he is prepared to act on them.

He's the only disciple to speak up, ready to go.
Not a peep from the others.

The next time we hear from him is in John 14. The disciples are now right in Jerusalem. They've gathered with Jesus in the Upper Room and are preparing to share the Passover meal. Jesus is teaching them as they eat. He says:

"I will take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." (v .3-4)

Guess who speaks up?

It's Thomas, who isn't **at all** sure of what the way is, or where the place may be that Jesus is referring to. The others probably weren't sure, either. But they sit back, silently. Thomas pipes up -
"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

He wants to understand.
He's engaged.
He's wanting to sort this one out.

That's Thomas.
His faith is real.
It is worth pursuing. Worth wrestling with. And worth dying for.
Nothing whimpy about it.

But that faith took a pounding on Friday.
And sat with deep bruises on Saturday.
Mired in tragedy on Sunday.
Crippled by pain, Thomas' faith was.
And he ends up wallowing in it all week.

I'm not sure why Jesus lets him experience it so long.
After all, Mary got a visit right in the garden.
Peter, apparently, also had a one-on-one with Jesus soon after.
And the whole gang got to see him Sunday evening.

But, somehow, Thomas was left out.
Which troubles me.
Because I'm a fix-it kind of guy.

See a problem, and my first response is to try and correct it.
Someone in pain - try to get rid of it.
Broken relationship - try and get them together again.
Misunderstanding - seek to rectify it.

Letting something linger like this?
That **hardly** seems right!

A whole **WEEK** struggling to reconcile what his buddies were saying with the horrible scenes that were replaying, over and over, in his mind.
I have trouble with that.

Just like I have trouble with so much of the pain that I see in this world.
Wishing that somehow God - or someone - would wave a magic wand and bring a fix to it.
Bring food to sub-Saharan Africa.
Bring a fair price to impoverished farmers.
Empty the cancer wards.
Heal the broken marriages.
But so much of that lingers.

And there comes Jesus.
At last.
He comes, complete with his scars.
The painting shows a wound in his side that is still open.
I wonder if it was.
But why not?

“Come and touch, Thomas.”
Feel the reality.
Feel me.
And feel peace.

For many years I read this account as if Jesus' voice were stern.
Or perhaps somewhat exasperated - fed up with weak Thomas' doubt.
But now, I don't think so anymore.

I think there was a gentleness there.
His words are an invitation.
Come, touch the wounds.

Ah - this is closer now than Thomas had been before.
In one way he is right back in Friday.
Right back at the cross.
Hearing the pounding of the nails, perhaps.
Seeing the body convulse when the spear is thrust in.
There he had been at a distance.
Now he could touch.
Only now it is pain coloured by victory.

Because the horror did not have the last word.
The Risen Jesus did.

Just like I believe he will have the last word
in Africa

and cancer wards
and in relationships between people.

And that last word will be a word of life.

It will be a word of healing.

It will be a word of re-creation when He returns to complete and perfect the task of making this world a peace-filled, whole place -

- ridding creation once and for all of sin and despair and tragedy and injustice and missed opportunities and sickness.

“My Lord and my God”, Thomas responds.

His life is forever changed.

In fact, ancient tradition says that he became a leading spokesman for the Christian message, taking it east towards India.

But before he goes, Jesus says to him, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Blessed -

How?

How to be blessed while struggling with the realities of pain and incomplete living and battered memories that fill so much of life?

Blessed like the poor in spirit.

Blessed like those who mourn.

Blessed like the meek.

Blessed like those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed like the pure in heart.

Blessed like the peacemakers.

Blessed like those who are persecuted.

Why are they blessed?

Certainly not because all that they long for, and pray for, and strive for comes to be immediately.

Indeed, sometimes such “blessed” people are left to struggle for more than just a week, like Thomas.

Sometimes it is for a lifetime.

But the blessing is this.

That in their struggle they reach beyond what they can sense and experience in these very limited 3 dimensions of creation that they call “reality.”

They reach for God - who is far greater reality, he is!

And they trust that all their living, and all their struggle, and all their pain is not overlooked.

But somehow God, through his son Jesus, enters into that bumpy ride called life. And he gathers it all up.

And somehow, somewhere, he puts it together and makes sense of it.

Even when we can't.

So, yes Thomas - you got a special gift.

You got to touch Jesus.

Not a sterilized, lets-pretend-that-nothing-happened one,
but a risen, still-wounded Christ.

You got to touch him.

Not everyone gets that.

But they are blessed, anyway.

And for people today.
Well, some get special put-your-finger-here kind of experiences.
They have amazing dreams.
Or they hear the voice of God.
Or they experience an angel in their room.
Or they are gifted with a healing.
In some way, a little corner of their life is restored.
They get a small taste of what the new creation will be like.

But those hints, those tastes, are not normative.
Not everyone gets them.
And those who get them, don't get them all the time.
Even they will have to live by faith that reaches beyond
what-you-see-is-what-you-get.

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son?
That's really the wrong title, isn't it. It really should be called "The Waiting Father." Because, really, it is about the patient longing and waiting and remembering and rejoicing and welcoming and restoring presence of the Father. THAT is the great miracle of the story.

Same thing here.
We call this the story of doubting Thomas.
But it really is about a merciful and loving Saviour, who comes into our painful experiences, and carefully brings us along.
He doesn't make the pain disappear.
Doesn't pretend it never happened.
And doesn't give us trouble for getting stuck in it.

Rather, he gently, somehow, in unique ways for every unique person, brings us the next step in life.
In a BLESSED life.
Why blessed?
Because he holds it.
And he controls the outcome.
And will bring us safely there.