

2nd Sunday of Easter
Jess Lee

before we get into the text, I want to share something from my dear friend Iris, studying now to become a teacher.

“my favorite thing to do, as a human and as a teacher, using my brain and my heart, is pick point Z and find a route back to point A. Let’s start by talking Ali vs. Fraiser and get to programmed cell death or barbershop quartet. I’ve always liked connecting unlikely things that don’t go together, and I genuinely believe we all have a million overheard and self-invented reasons, of varying durability and quality, telling us why we don’t belong in this space or any, with those people or any. So when I’m lecturing, I love to demonstrate the connection of unlikely things. Mostly I love it because if the history of computing can connect to tribal drum-circles, then a kid learns a few things: nothing *has* to connect to only one thing and nothing *can’t* connect to other things. therefore, I don’t have to connect to only one type of person *and* nobody has to be alone. with work and attention, anything is related. with work and attention, anyone can find community. you don’t need permission to make links. just make links. just reach out.”

so, with that in mind, I am going to connect why Thomas putting his hands into the literal side wound of the risen Christ, why Thomas making that link, helps to set up the community described in acts, the one that held everything in common, that made so many links, and helps us to continue to make links today.

at the start of the pandemic, when I was still living in Tucson, I was working at a sort of Meals on Wheels program that was housed out of the parish I worked for. We had a small team of volunteers that would cook and deliver meals to two senior apartment complexes around Tucson. We were a small program, but fed around 40 people each week.

I had gotten to know several of the residents in the apartments before COVID hit, as I delivered food each week and often took my friend’s tiny dog Amos with me. And as stores started to be bare, and shopping was deemed unsafe, my phone began to ring from our clients trying to get toilet paper, trying to get medications safely, trying to get cleaning supplies, trying to live.

While the programs initial goal was to provide one cooked meal a day, when the pandemic hit, we pivoted to a sort of hotline for the people living in the apartment buildings. My phone number spread throughout the apartments. And people called, looking for what they needed. Eventually, we had to close the program to outside volunteers, so my housemate Maxine and I took over.

The stock of toilet paper for the now empty church was given out. The soap and shampoo that we kept at the campus ministry center for students who needed toiletries were given when someone called looking for soap. The ice cream that someone needed we picked up at the grocery store, along with another woman’s prescription.

And the time that Maxine and I spent together and with the people that lived in the apartments, who we started to call our Old Friends, to me, it felt most like the community described in Acts than any

other space I have been in. We attempted to hold all things in common, and we tried to distribute to all based on need.

And when this pivot happened, when it became clear that the crisis was going to continue beyond two weeks, Maxine and I operated under two ground rules, which I think allowed us to live into this communal giving:

The first: if at any point we felt that either of us couldn't keep up with the work or got sick or felt unsafe, we would stop, both in the short-term and in the long-term. If one of us needed to sleep in, we could. And, if COVID got worse and we could no longer do our work safely, we could stop the program. We would respect each other's limits and have boundaries on what we would do. We would trust ourselves and each other to know what they needed in order to keep feeding others, in order to keep feeding ourselves, in order to help others live, in order for ourselves to live.

And I tried not to doubt Maxine when she said she needed the day off. And I tried not to doubt myself when I needed to play video games all afternoon to regroup.

and our second ground rule: if we had what someone asked for, either in the church or in our house or in the campus ministry where I was also working, we would give that person that thing, no questions asked. If someone called looking for food or toilet paper or masks, they probably needed that thing, and so we gave them that thing.

We tried to trust each of the people we talked with to know what they needed in order to be fed, in order to keep feeding others, in order for them to live, and in order for them to help others live.

And so, we attempted to hold everything in common and distribute what we had been given.

And looking back, these two ground rules that we tried to live into, were two forms of the one truth: our lives and our bodies, and others lives and bodies, are sources of knowledge, and that this knowledge can allow us both to serve others and be served by others, and to live and to help others live.

And I think today's Gospel gets at this. We see Thomas, who often becomes this stand in for those that may not have enough faith, whatever not having enough faith means, asking Christ for something, for a form of knowledge of the Resurrection. *unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hands in his side, I will not believe.*

And knowledge is a strange thing. What kinds of knowledge, and whose knowledge is preferred and allowed to have meaning has changed over the course of our history and is never outside of politicization, especially within Christianity.

And it is beyond the scope of this sermon to determine which knowledge is appropriate or more valued for every circumstance, as truly that is its own field of epistemology, but I do want to simply to point out that the way that Thomas *knows* that Christ has died and is risen from the dead.

Thomas knows Jesus is risen because his fingers are inside of the body of God. It is not through a letter, it is not through the words of the other disciples, it is not through an eloquent argument, it is not through enough data, but it is through Thomas putting his fingers into Christ's gaping side

wound, that the Resurrection is proclaimed to Thomas. It is through this flesh meeting flesh that Thomas is able to live and is able to bring others to live in Christ.

It is fingers touching some organ, possibly a kidney, possibly a lung, maybe even that same lung that breathed on the other disciples earlier in the gospel passage and gave them the Holy Spirit (When he said this, he breathed on them and said, receive the holy spirit); I really want to imagine that Thomas touched that lung that that just breathed on this disciples and he too, then received the Holy Spirit, but we do not know which organ exactly was touched, and that is okay.

It is hard for me to read this Gospel passage today, one Christ's body is changed is known by Thomas, and that change and that knowing of change is seen as good and holy and leading to life, and not think of my own trans body, and not think of proposed bills across the country barring trans children from accessing healthcare and being who they know to be, and the bill passed in Arkansas banning gender-affirming healthcare for transgender children.

And much of the debate surrounding trans children comes down to whose knowledge is valued.

As Jules Gill-Peterson, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh writes on wanting those to trust her own experience as a trans woman, *"Do I need harder data than my flesh, dear professor? What are you so afraid of in the certainty of my gut that you would prefer to restrain me with abstract numbers?"*

And I can imagine Thomas and Jesus asking the same thing, to each other, to us now.

*do you need harder data than my flesh
do you need harder data that the wounds of my sides
do you need harder data than your fingers touching my kidneys
why are we so afraid of the certainty in his flesh that we would prefer to restrain Christ*

And so, as Thomas trusted the flesh of Christ, we too are able to trust each other. We can trust those around us to know what they need. We can trust trans children. We can trust all children. We can trust the elders living in the apartment buildings who called my phone. We can trust all elders. We can trust in the flesh of Christ that his body, that our bodies are where knowledge and Resurrection can be found.

It was a joyful thing that Thomas was able to enter the side of Jesus and gain the knowledge of the Resurrection, to live and to help others live. It was a joyful thing when Maxine said to me that she needed to sleep, in order to live and to help others live. It was a joyful thing every time my phone rang, when someone knew what they needed, in order to live and to help others live. It is a joyful thing for trans children and adults to know what they need, in order to live and to help others live. It is a joyful thing when any of us can enter our own hands into the side of Jesus and know the Resurrection for ourselves.