

Ever since he was little Felix has always brought an unexpected profundity to his faith. For as long as I can remember, he has always come up with just the most random, thought-provoking questions about God, about the world, and how it all works. We joke that he will be the next pastor amongst us, that's the level of depth these questions are at. Let me tell you, the joy I got when Jennifer started seminary so that I wasn't the only aunt to be pointed to with these deep questions of faith. Now I can just say, umm, maybe go as Aunt Jenn. Felix has always needed a certain level of logic when it comes to things in his life, and as we all know, logic and faith can sometimes run up against each other, something he ran smack dab up against on Easter.

For some reason, the whole stone being rolled back from the tomb hit Felix this year. He told Kristin that he has always thought that the women had to roll it back and so when it clicked in his mind that the stone was already rolled away, his logical, teenage brain started churning. If the stone was rolled away already then who is to say someone didn't just come in and steal the body? Maybe someone moved it! Kristin of course then tried to steer him towards the resurrection appearances. They didn't steal it because he appeared to people. And God bless my nephew, without missing a beat, he declared, "That's like someone saying they saw Big Foot! One person

claims they saw it and then everyone says they saw Big Foot too!” It was a whole thing, that honestly kind of amused me when thought about in that way. Suddenly, I was thinking about Jesus and the Loch Ness Monster, and it was very entertaining, but more and more, especially as I turned over another year of pondering the Thomas story, I thought about just how Jesus appeared to the disciples, about the Jesus that shows up for them, and the Jesus that, in particular, shows up for Thomas.

The second week of Easter is the bane of every preacher’s existence, if I’m not being too dramatic about it. The lectionary might rotate on a three year basis, but one thing never, ever, ever changes. Jesus is risen! Let’s talk about doubt! Without fail, the week after Easter has to come with Thomas and his questions, his incredulity, his angst that the other disciples got something that he did not because he wasn’t there, and so even as we are still filled with the joy of Easter, we must walk this doubt strewn road alongside him, and frankly, it’s probably a good place for us to be.

It is the evening of the resurrection and the disciples are tucked behind closed doors, fearing that in the aftermath of the crucifixion they may be next on the authorities list for arrest and punishment. They are hunkered down, in fear and trepidation, having heard the words of the women about the empty tomb, having heard Peter and John’s affirming testimony to the

fact that wherever Jesus is, he is not behind a stone sealed tomb. They are wondering, hoping, questioning what has happened and what impact it is going to have on them, but with no clear cut answers before them, they lock the doors and stay silent. All except for Thomas...

Who knows where Thomas is, why he wasn't there, but no matter the reasons, he misses Jesus appearing before the other ten disciples. He misses the giving of the Holy Spirit, the promise of peace upon their hearts. He misses all of it, and frankly, there's part of me that wants to be like, did no one say, "Hey, Thomas isn't here!" Did Jesus not do a quick head count and think maybe we need to wait for all of this until everyone is here? It mostly just leaves me feeling bad for him, he's daring to be out in the world while the rest are hidden away and because of that he misses the miracle! It's annoying, and one can only imagine how he felt when he got back to the room and was inundated with shouts and exclamations and tears of relief and joy. The lat he checked they were all still confused and in mourning, and now suddenly, everyone is overjoyed and talking about seeing Jesus. What did he miss? Well apparently, everything.

Honestly, I think I'm with Thomas here. Out of sheer annoyed defiance, I too would be like, I am not buying this until I see it for myself. I don't even know if I would want to label it doubt, so much as just another

layer of grief that he missed out, a longing for what the others received, a desire to also see Jesus and be able to experience this feeling of elation. Fast forward a week and Thomas is finally going to get what he demanded. Once again, still shut up behind closed doors, the disciples bear witness to Jesus, and thank goodness, Thomas is there this time. But what follows isn't necessarily what you might expect to happen.

What you might expect is for Jesus to say, look into my eyes, look at my facial features, don't I *look* like me? What you might expect is for Jesus to break bread with them and like the men on the road to Emmaus, their eyes would be opened with recognition. What you might expect is simply the sound of his voice, the inflection of certain words to be the thing that sparks resurrection joy, but it's not. Jesus gives Thomas what Thomas had demanded, he would only know Jesus by his wounds. *That* is what would trigger recognition, and Jesus gives that to him. Jesus bears his hands and his side for Thomas to see, showing him, declaring, see, it's me, by my wounds you can recognize me. It's not the thing you would expect to be the most recognizable part of Jesus, and yet, it's the part we need most.

When you're dealing with the Messiah, the Son of God, it would be reasonable, logical even, to assume that in his resurrection, he would be made whole, wounds removed, no scars, no evidence of the pain that his

body bore for the sake of the whole world, and yet, the exact opposite is what happens. It is precisely because of his wounds that he is recognizable to Thomas and the other disciples. It is not by his voice or his actions, but by the marks on his body; it is by the fact that Jesus doesn't shy away from the fragility of his human body that causes Thomas to proclaim him not only Lord, but also God—the first person to do so in scripture.

You may be wondering, well but what is that to us? What difference does it make *how* Jesus appeared? Isn't the point just that he *did* in fact appear? Not like Big Foot, but as the Messiah? The difference it makes is that in these post-Easter days, we might be feeling a little bit like Felix, a little bit like Thomas, like some of the luster has worn off and suddenly we have questions, doubts, fears. We're tired. The brass is gone, the scent of the lilies doesn't linger anymore, and we're just left as...us. It can make us question—are we not good enough? Is our faith not strong enough? Are we only enamored with an Easter dawn Jesus and the rest of the time, we don't know what we believe? It can make us feel painfully human, like our faith is weak and faltering, and then Jesus shows up wounded...Jesus, in all of his resurrection glory shows up with the marks of human weakness still upon his body. He is risen as Lord, as King, as Messiah, and yet his body still bears the marks of frailty. And y'all if Jesus is still bearing the marks of

what he endured upon his body, if his humanity is still written upon his resurrected flesh, then it is not a shameful thing to experience moments of weakness, moments of doubt, moments of wondering.

Jesus stands before the disciples and says this is who he is in the resurrection, still wounded, still scarred, it didn't just magically disappear, and I think there is no better way to describe the import of that than with words from Pope Francis. In talking about this wounded, resurrected Jesus, this is what he said, "In adoring and kissing his wounds, we come to realize that in his tender love all our weaknesses are accepted. We touch him and he touches our lives. He makes heaven come down to us. His radiant wounds dispel the darkness we carry within." By showing Thomas his hands and his side, Jesus tells all the disciples that it is ok for them to show their wounds, their weaknesses. To Peter he says, see my hands, and know I see your denial, those moments of weakness, and I love you. To John he says, see my side, and know I see the hubris you put into outpacing Peter to the tomb, those moments of humanity, and I love you. To Thomas he says, see my hands and my side, and know I see your doubts, those moments of questioning, and I love you. To us, he says, see my wounds, see my scars, and know I see yours too, you do not need to hide them, and I love you, in all of your brilliant, beautiful, messy humanity.

In Jesus' wounds we see how very close to him we are, because he knows what pain feels like, what hurt feels like, what heartbreak feels like, what indecision and doubt feels like, and he says, it's ok, they don't make you unworthy or broken, because in me, you are perfect and I will always make you whole, but you don't need to shy away from or hide who you really are in my presence, because I am not shying away from you.

What Felix, what Thomas remind us of is that it is blissfully human to ask questions, to dare to speak them aloud, and Jesus here blesses those instincts and says bring them here, speak them out, you don't have to hide your humanity, it is precisely *for* your humanity that I bear this wounds and if I'm not hiding them, you don't need to either. We all know we have this instinct, to put our best foot forward, say the right things, appear the right way when we are in the presence of Jesus, when we're in the presence of each other, and Jesus says, stop. See my hands, see my side, be yourself. You can show your weakness, you can show your wounds, you can just be you. That's all I expect, all I want. I stand before you as I am, I give myself to you as I am, you don't have to do anything different. People of God, Jesus doesn't expect anything from us except our hearts, tired, weary, wondering as they may be. See his hands, see his side, and know, that here is where you can bring your full self, Big Foot questions and all. **AMEN!!!**