



It was a spiritual and even emotional jolt last weekend for many children of God around the world. The Son of God rising from the dead to live with all humanity has a tendency to reel people in every Easter Sunday, after all. But hopefully, after all the Holy Week proceedings concluded, that all those celebrations left people wanting more, and not just hoping that more people would keep on coming back to the pews after last Sunday's full-scale worship experience; but wanting to experience more of the Risen Christ, wanting to experience the Messiah not just on biblical pages of long ago, but seeing Jesus still alive and well in this world, in our lives today. So yes, hopefully Easter, yet again, unleashed a spiritual and even emotional jolt, but also left us wanting more. And I wonder if that's all Thomas was asking for: just a little more of the Christ who rose for him, too.

I still remember a night during my year of seminary internship, part of the wider church's endeavor in shaping leaders of congregations, and for the semester before I left campus to learn from another pastor at another faith community for about 12 months or so; that preceding semester included our required preaching course, so that it may appear like we half-know what we're doing up here, I suppose. And part of that class was researching how other sermons were given in history or even in more modern times. So, some preachers did almost a Bible study from the pulpit, breaking down however many verses from Scripture. Others would re-tell the ancient story in their own words in hopes to help it make more sense for the assembly. Others would make it more of a testimony, drawing in personal faith experience. Some would focus on a current event that was pulling at people's heart-strings, and say how Scripture would respond, from their perspective; just to name a few. And some would do a little bit of everything, if the mood so struck them. Then, this one night, after spending two years at seminary trying to put as much as we learned into practice, and hoping to learn from a more veteran clergyperson in an actual congregation setting, since professors cannot cover absolutely everything that may happen in sanctuaries and fellowship halls and church meeting rooms. I heard my supposed wise pastoral leader do something that I wasn't sure would ever be allowed from any pulpit, nor accepted by any preaching professor in history: his entire sermon was questions. Not just one to set himself up, not just one to get people in the pews thinking. The whole sermon was questions.

But, one of the supposed insider tricks not just for church leaders but any public speaker is that you have to read the room. And in that sanctuary that night, was not our usual Sunday morning collection of congregation members, but a room full of pastors and staff from the respective local synod of the ELCA, as they were about to gather for an evening to talk about the wider church and its future. You've got to read the room, and that room didn't need preached at that night. They needed comfort. They needed re-assurance. They needed an actual sanctuary: a spiritual and emotional sanctuary, because those church leaders were continuing to navigate a rather interesting terrain for their respective faith communities they cherished, and well, well beyond. They came in with their questions, too: about what was going on with the institution and people they had poured their heart and soul into, and what was still to come for all of it.

And I have this feeling that they all came in that night, into that sanctuary, just like Thomas: with a little bit of fear, a little bit of worry, but also a little bit of hope, and a little bit of desperately wanting more, wanting a little bit more of the supposedly still-living Christ; all the while respecting the time spent in studying him on biblical pages and seminary textbooks, but wanting a little more awareness of Jesus right there and then. I like to think the sanctuary was filled with Thomases that night, and I have a feeling many faith communities around the world are filled with him even today.

And although my wise pastoral leader from internship probably shattered every preaching rule that night, he delivered the questions in such a way not as if he had the answers to all the questions (granted, some pastors do have all the answers, but I'm not of them, just so we're clear on that), but he unleashed the questions in such a way to make it safe, to make it beautiful, to make it even holy that all the Thomases in the pews that night, that they all had their questions, too; because they all just wanted a little more of the Risen Christ right then and there.

And hopefully the idea behind most proclamations from the pulpit is to leave you wanting more, and so that when those church leaders walked from the sanctuary to the fellowship hall, they were given permission and further empowered for the holy conversations to ensue at those tables. And that, when people departed from their Holy Week proceedings last week, they couldn't help but keep thinking about it in the car ride home, and bring it up around the dining room table, or when you hit a spot in a conversation with a friend, you can't help but feel this spiritual and emotional pull to bring up how you felt impacted in recent days, to share it with them, because you cannot help but be convinced that Jesus insists on living in them, too. And that maybe on the other side of the conversation is another Thomas with a little bit of fear and worry, but maybe still a little bit of hope, and a little bit of just wanting more of a love that not even death could stop. And maybe with more than a little bit of questions about all of this, and sometimes they just need to feel a sanctuary that is not confined to church building walls: a sanctuary that lovingly and boldly lives in the Risen Christ, a forgiving and gracious sanctuary that lives in you, too. For Christ is Risen indeed, in you as well. So for that Greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!