

**Thomas' Twins? Acts 4:32-35; I John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31; Psalm 133 4-23-06**

Early in the morning the other day, as I lay sleeping, I became aware of the patter of eight little feet racing through the parsonage. Now, most of you know I live with two cats, Teddy and Pookie, and I have been made aware, during my time here, that when I hear such a patter of feet racing all over the place, the two of them are in hot pursuit of some poor, hapless little mouse. This was, indeed, the case in those early morning hours. Sometimes the little pace car of a mouse fools them both and gives them the slip. This was not the case the other morning.

For some reason these events always occur at about 2:30 a.m. When I hear this going on I jolt awake, fumble around for the light switch and prepare myself for what is to come. For, what is to come is inevitable-- as certain as death and taxes.

Whichever cat has caught the mouse cannot just catch it and release it, or catch it and quietly eat it. Of course not. First my approval must be sought. So, the successful cat trots into my bedroom, mouse in mouth. This does not seem to satisfy him or her, because the cat assumes that I cannot see well enough to appreciate what he or she has done. Either Ted or Pookie leaps up on the bed to show me the latest catch. This I can handle pretty well by now, but most often, he or she needs to make certain I am fully aware of the good deed.

Now, I *never doubt* that a mouse has been caught—I can see the poor thing's little feet and tail hanging out of a kitty mouth. But, just to make sure I can fully join in the experience, the cat will drop the mouse before me as close as he or she can get it. Of course, the mouse is never dead. Never. So, it takes off across the bedspread and the pillows causing great sport for all of us. I know the cats take particular joy in watching me spring into action while still relatively groggy as I try to out maneuver the tiny, tiny mouse.

The wee beastie usually ends up under the night table and the cats keep a long watch, almost a vigil, hoping for it to be foolish enough to reappear. I am caught at this moment in time between telling them how good they are and telling them to get the mouse out of there. This also turns into a prayerful moment as I recall that little prayer that tells, us: "From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties. And things that go bump in the night. Good Lord, deliver us." I might add, "from things that go squeek in the night," too.

I have shared some of these events with some of you in the past and you look at me as though I am a little daft, which I am, pat me condescendingly and, usually, gently on the head and look at me with doubtful eyes. If you do not see it, I am sure you are thinking, you will not believe it.

Did you know that this particular Sunday of each year, as well as being known as "Low Sunday" is known in many churches as "Holy Hilarity Sunday?" It is also known as "the Feast of Fools." After the serious season of Lent and the joy of Easter a little lightness is thought to be needed in worship. There is a friend of mine who simply reels off one joke after another on this Sunday. I have never quite entered into the spirit of the "Feast of Fools." I guess that's because I think that while we are to be a joyful people as Christians, I can't quite become totally corny. And, on this day when we often think of Thomas and his struggle with belief in the resurrected Christ, and our own struggles, I realize that while much is funny in life and the way we deal with it, there is much that needs deeper reflective thought. One never knows when time for such thought may arise.

As I was sitting at the Toyota dealership in Torrington the other day waiting for some routine maintenance to be completed on my rapidly aging vehicle, I was, as always, reading. The book I was and am reading is entitled *Practicing Resurrection* by Nora Gallagher.

It is a book about the process of discernment undertaken by men and women who feel called into the Episcopal priesthood before they are admitted into seminary. This process usually lasts about one year. This is something we Congregationalists do in a far more informal way. It is a time set aside to address any doubts and hesitations ministerial candidates might have. It is an intense time of searching and questioning no matter which denomination it is in which a person might live and move and have his or her being.

This process does not always remove all doubts from our minds. It couldn't because the deeper and deeper we walk into the study and practice of ministry, the more questions arise to which, if we are honest at all, we have no definitive answers. This leads most of us into a lifelong process of questioning, discerning, sifting and winnowing all the facts and supposed facts before us, and learning to "take the meat and leave the bones" as a Catholic friend of mine is fond of saying. Often her "meat and bones" are very different from mine. But when we get down to the true heart of what it is that calls us to minister to others, we find that we are the same.

Thomas was taking all the evidence the other disciples had laid out before him and was considering it carefully. He wanted to decide what was true for him and what was not. He did not just accept what he was told and hope that it was true. He needed to see the risen Christ before he could or would draw any conclusions. So, he walked around with a cloud of doubt hanging over him until the cloud was dispelled by the appearance of his friend.

We must agree that Thomas was very thorough about examining Jesus as he stood before him. Through his examination he became completely convinced that what the other disciples had told him was true and he could go on his way spreading the "good news" of all he had seen and known first hand. Perhaps, we are Thomas' twins in the way we would like to have some solid, physical evidence that reveals to us the essential truth of the resurrection to eternal life. The resurrection that we have been assured is ours if we learn to follow the way, the truth and the life.

Thomas is chided a bit by Jesus because of his desire to actually see the wounds on his body. And, we can take some comfort from his words knowing we are blessed because we believe without seeing.

As blessed as were those early followers mentioned in the book of Acts. Some had been witnesses to the resurrection and post resurrection appearances, others had not. Yet they moved forward carrying what they knew of Christ with them. But they not only carried their faith forward, they *lived it* sharing all they had so that no one was needy. They stuck together waiting for the return of their Master for which they longed and prayed. They literally gave up their former ways of life to take up an entirely new one. This must have taken great patience, love, understanding and times of forgiveness as they shared close quarters. As time went on they most likely shared some doubts, also, but they held on to the central message of Jesus as the Messiah who had come to save them from themselves.

So where does this leave us on the first Sunday after Easter? Free from all doubt? Most likely not. Free to keep on thinking and studying and growing? To keep on searching for evidence not seen?

One can only hope so. For if we are to be those faithful followers who manage to carry the essence of our faith forward for those who follow, we need to always be ready to accept and process new information, in the manner of Thomas, and then move forward in the manner of Christ. It is what we have been called to do as his followers. Amen