

JESUS IS LISTENING  
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

JOHN 20:24-27  
APR 23, 2017

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

When someone dies, especially if it is sudden and unexpected,  
it can take a long time for it to soak in for loved ones.

At first it may be hard to believe or not even seem real at all.

They may feel little or no reaction.

Dealing with it is a process that may take a long time.

Often part of the processing is talking about it.

Friends or family may hear same things over & over.

It is tempting to cut off what is being said

with a response that is intended to be helpful,

but too often may seem trite or even insensitive.

Often one of the best things to do is simply to listen,

to listen with attention and compassion.

If that is what it is like when someone dies,

what about if someone suddenly and unexpectedly  
comes back to life again.

That would really be hard to believe & take time to process.

This is certainly true for Thomas

and is apt to be true of others as well.

John writes that his goal in telling us about this  
is not simply that we believe that Jesus is alive  
but that we believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God,  
and that by believing we may have life in his name.  
We who now believe have the same message and goal  
As Peter said, "We are witnesses to these things."  
Those who heard him were enraged & wanted to kill him.  
Maybe that is not the response we are going for.  
So how can we witness effectively?  
Our witnessing and other people coming to faith  
is also part of a process, sometimes a long process,  
This process includes sharing, inviting and encouraging,  
along with teaching and demonstrating  
which we see in today's readings and in upcoming readings,  
But often a first part is simply listening,  
patiently listening without jumping in to respond too soon.  
Today and in coming weeks, we are going to consider  
a pattern for relational, contextual witnessing  
which can be remembered with the acronym, LASSIE:  
Listen, Ask, Seek, Share, Invite, Encourage.  
We start with listening because...

LISTENING ALLOWS PEOPLE TO CONNECT  
LISTENING HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND  
LISTENING SHOWS THAT JESUS CARES

LISTENING ALLOWS PEOPLE TO CONNECT

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

Thomas seems to have gotten disconnected from disciples,  
we don't know why or for how long.  
That is often also true of those we meet who are  
disconnected from Christ and his church.  
So how do we get connected?  
When someone calls another on the phone, who speaks first?  
It is expected the one who is being called, saying, "Hello."  
Unless it is a recorded robo-call which just starts talking,  
and what do people usually do then? Hang up.  
If someone delivers something to a home, who opens the door?  
It is expected to be the one who is receiving.

If someone tried to just open your door and walk in,  
you may immediately try to keep them out.  
So if you want a conversation with someone about Jesus,  
what is the best way to make a connection and get started?  
The line of communication is opened best by  
letting the other person start the talking.  
If you want someone to listen to you,  
you want to listen to them first.  
One reason is so you can learn how they tend to communicate.  
Picture a person's head, heart and hands.  
Sometimes people tend to communicate from the head,  
focusing on ideas, knowledge, concepts.  
They may feel the need to understand & be convinced.  
Other times they tend to communicate from the heart.  
about feelings, emotions and relationships.  
They may be sensitive to hurts or seeking joy.  
Other times they tend to communicate with hands.  
I don't mean just talking with hand gestures  
but preferring to be seeing and doing things  
that are practical and make an impact on lives.  
Careful listening is crucial for understanding how that person  
communicates and is best communicated with  
in the current context.

Next...

#### LISTENING HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND

<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Where do you think Thomas is coming from,  
head, heart or hands?

Maybe it is head. He is saying, "I need proof."

So now, what makes him say this?

Maybe he saw Jesus die and it is an image  
he just can't get out of his head.

Several times in this reading Jesus says, "Peace be with you."  
as he speaks to different situations.

There are many things that shatter the peace in our lives.  
We live in a broken world where people are broken many ways.  
Think of ways in which people have...

Bodies broken by sickness, disability, fatigue, hunger  
Minds broken by worry, drugs, confusion  
Families broken by distance, divorce, bitterness  
Finances broken by debt, poverty, bankruptcy, gambling  
Broken communities, broken workplaces, the list goes on.  
All around us are other people in need of Christ's peace  
but effectively sharing it with them starts first  
with listening carefully to understand  
what brokenness is bothering them.  
Later we will talk about how we may find connections  
because we share the same kind of brokenness  
But listen to Thomas and consider what he is dealing with.  
It may sound like despair or disappointment.  
It may be feeling left out because the others say  
that they got to see what he didn't.  
And what do the other disciples say in response?  
John doesn't say. Maybe they didn't say anything yet.  
What could they do? They couldn't do what he asked.  
But that doesn't mean they didn't respond.  
Listening itself is responding. It is showing one cares.  
especially when eye contact and body language  
shows one is actually paying attention,  
not just thinking about what to say in reply.  
Where do we get this kind of way to relate to others?  
Like everything else we need for witnessing  
and everything else we need in life,  
it comes from Jesus.

## LISTENING SHOWS THAT JESUS CARES

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Thomas didn't see him, but Jesus was obviously already there and he was listening. He heard what Thomas said and so he responded with what Thomas needed as he responds in the way each of his disciples needs. He didn't respond immediately, just as we may be best to not respond immediately

and as it may often seem God is not responding  
to our prayers as quickly as we expect.  
But Jesus is always listening to us and our prayers.  
He knows just what we need and when we need it.  
What Jesus does shows Thomas not just that he is alive  
but something just as important – that he cares.  
He cares enough to listen. Which is too rare.  
This is what causes us to believe in Jesus  
and by believing to have life in his name.  
He cares enough to be patient with us & our lack of faith,  
to be gentle with us in our brokenness.  
He cares enough to give us his word through eyewitnesses,  
a living and powerful word which is able to cause faith  
in those who have seen terrible things  
and do not yet see what God has to come.  
He cares enough to give us forgiveness  
after listening to our confession  
and to give us the ability to forgive others as well.  
He cares enough to give us his own Holy Spirit  
to hold us together despite our brokenness  
and give us wisdom, courage, and power.  
His care is what gives us peace.  
No matter how our minds are confused, what our hearts feel  
or what our hands can do about what is happening,  
we can talk to him about it and he is always listening.  
Because of what he is doing for us  
and how he has brought us to faith,  
we too can listen to others.  
Be listening this week to what people around you are saying.  
Be thinking about who you might be a witness to.

#### LISTENING ALLOWS PEOPLE TO CONNECT

Listen to how people express themselves  
from their head, heart or hands.

#### LISTENING HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND

Listen to for the various ways in which  
people experience brokenness and need peace.

#### LISTENING SHOWS THAT JESUS CARES

Listen to what John and the other witnesses  
are telling us about Jesus' unseen presence with us  
always listening to our prayers and giving us  
what we need most when we need it, now and forever