

Sermon April 8, 2018      The Proof is in the Pudding      Cara B. Hochhalter

Acts 4:32-35      and      John 20:19-29

Perhaps the Queen of the Pudding Contest, Tinky Weisblat, knows that the expression, "The Proof is in the Pudding" really began as "The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating!"

In other words, you cannot really tell how good a pudding is, no matter how it LOOKS, or what other people TELL you...you cannot know how good a pudding is, until you eat it! Right, Tinky?

So, no matter what the disciples told Thomas about the miracle of Jesus appearing to them, he had to see for himself.... If this doubting Thomas could only touch the wound where Jesus had hung on the cross, then he would know and then he would believe it.

Let us be in prayer: Unbelievable God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There are SO many examples of natural phenomenon that we absolutely would not believe...unless we could see for ourselves. We LIVE in a world of miracles that are astounding... How do the proper insects find their ways to the particular flowers that they need to pollinate? How do ants build whole communities doing a variety of jobs that make it all work? I feel so ignorant of the intricacies of the ecosystems in which we live...and most of the time, I do not even think of the effects I have on my environment...like how many plastic bags that I use, find their way into the ocean...?

In the book, "The Hidden Life of Trees," it is astounding to learn that trees communicate; can sense when they need to put off chemicals to repel certain insects and even seem to be able to "hear" what is going on around them.

I love science; I love hearing these incredible things that we cannot see on our own...and I believe them but there is also so much mystery and so much that we know on other levels...through intuition, through our feelings, and through spiritual sensitivities....my favorite example is to wonder why a flower is beautiful. It is after all, just a collection of cells and yet I am attracted to its beauty. There is something of the Divine, reflected in Nature...and I believe that God/ Spirit...is that living grace that wells up within us and all life...it lures us towards living peaceably in relationship with our environment and one another.

But, I heard something this week that made me say, "Wait a minute!" It seems our town and others, too, are preparing for emergencies because of "the world we live in today". This caught me off guard and I thought, "*what* world we live in today?" Then I realized they were talking about violence, shootings, and how we need to be prepared. Now, I am not hiding my head in the sand...I hate hearing about soldiers shooting unarmed demonstrators and police shooting black men in their yards and mentally unstable people driving cars into crowds...but is this the *whole* of the world we live in?

I think many people are addicted to news that constantly holds up the worst, making us feel like we live in a horrible, scary, threatening time. Yes, we definitely have problems with gun violence and mental health care and other issues, too...but can we address them....with time and concerted efforts? Aren't people rising up right now to bring about constructive changes?

What is the kind of world we live in? What is the world you live in...is there beauty and music and love? Is there kindness, compassion and curiosity? Do you wake up every morning afraid or do you wake up ready to take on the day...to give thanks for the life that is yours!?

What kind of world do *you* believe we live in?

The disciples were afraid...it is interesting isn't it, that Jesus who had been locked in a tomb was freely moving about, when the disciples had locked themselves in a room. They were afraid...as I see so many people in our own days...afraid, ready to lock themselves up in their own fears....locked into anger and frustration. This is not just being practical and prepared for the worst...this is paranoia that limits our living in faith.

When the disciples saw Jesus again...they had to believe in a future that included "God with them!" They had to believe in themselves. They had to believe that "the world they lived in "held the potential for Good News".... And so those early Christians found community. They were strengthened by the sharing of resources and the challenge of living this Good News with one another *in the midst of their own world!*

Twice, Jesus told them "Peace be with you." And the only way you will find this peace is if you forgive.... The only way you will find this Holy Peace is through forgiveness. Does this mean forgiving some angry person who has committed a mass shooting...yes. It means seeing through to the hurt and pain of this person and to

figure out how our society can help people like him who feel marginalized and on the outside. It may be easier to hide in fear, but Jesus said otherwise.

Jesus "breathed God's spirit on them"....and they were empowered to go out there, responding to this gift of love, even without Jesus beside them....even in the midst of a world that certainly also had violence. Did Jesus tell them to barricade themselves with weapons? No. Jesus sent them out in love and forgiveness...not a wimpy kind of love, but an engaging, honest and unconditional love to embrace...even those who were called enemies.

Whew! What a story for "the world in which we live!"

Kristin Johnston Largen writes that the peace that Jesus handed out "turned upside down the societal conventions of first and last, blessed and cursed, rich and poor." It is a different kind of vision....even as this Way, has been met in every age with rejection and harassment!

We have to ask ourselves if we truly embrace this Way...or if we have rejected it have we also rejected God? Are we like Thomas in doubting...not whether Jesus could come again...but doubting whether this Way of Love, Forgiveness and Peace...is possible in "this world in which we live!?"

Some of you have heard of the incredible preacher, William Sloan Coffin who preached at Riverside Church in New York...maybe he even came here sometime...I don't know. But hear his insightful words: "As I see it, the primary religious task these days is to try to think straight...You can't think straight with a heart full of fear, for fear seeks safety, not truth. If your heart's a stone, you can't have decent thoughts---either about personal relations or about international ones. A heart full of love, on the other hand, has a limbering effect on the mind."

A heart full of love, has a limbering effect on the mind! Turning from hearts of stone and rigid fear...to hearts full of love that respond to a Holy Grace....even *in this world in which we live!* Maybe, *especially* in this world in which we live!

I feel such a calling to speak this truth of love and forgiveness in this world in which we live...a world where others may be asking us to hunker down in fear. Perhaps it is a choice... and if we choose love, we have so much work to do. It will be a challenge to speak of the world from a different perspective.

I close with a poem from the Odes of Solomon. They were re-discovered in 1909 in England and probably written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... perhaps reflecting words from Jesus

himself as most believe the language was Syriac or Aramaic. While they do not mention Jesus, there is language similar to the Gospel of John and Ignatious, and perhaps were interpolated from Jewish writings. There were 41 of these Odes and I will read from number 11. I was imagining Thomas saying these words about his encounter with Christ..... and his experience of God.

My heart was split, and a flower  
appeared; and grace sprang up;  
and it bore fruit for my God.  
You split me, tore my heart  
openly filled me with love.  
You poured your spirit into me;  
I knew you as I know myself.  
Speaking waters touched me  
from your fountain, the source of life....

And you have made all things new;  
you have showed me all things shining...

A garden whose fruit is joy;  
and you are the sun upon me.  
My eyes are radiant with your spirit;...  
my ears delight in your music,  
and my face is covered with your dew.

Blessed are the men and women  
who are planted on your earth, in your garden,  
who grow as your trees and flowers grow,  
who transform their darkness to light.  
Their roots plunge into darkness;  
their faces turn toward the light.

All those who love you are beautiful;  
they overflow with your presence  
So that they can do nothing but good.  
there is infinite space in your garden;  
all men, all women are welcome here;  
all they need do is enter.

Amen.

