



## **April 8, 2018 - Faith in the Absence of Jesus**

### **Given by Rev. Mattei**

When she was old enough, Linda was eager to go to school. Her father, Rev. Oliver Brown, attempted to enroll her in the local elementary school in Topeka, Kansas. But this was in 1950 and schools were segregated. When she was denied access, Rev. Brown sued the school on Linda's behalf all the way to the Supreme Court and won in 1954.<sup>1</sup> Linda and her father Oliver lived to see the day, in 1956, when all schools in Topeka were officially integrated. I am convinced that day must have felt like being born again, a creation day of something new, when Light is called forth, a Light that no darkness can overcome.<sup>2</sup> Yet, with the passing of the years, Linda noticed that the end of official segregation policies didn't eradicate the actual segregation of schools. Darkness continued to conspire to extinguish the Light. In 1979, she reopened the case, claiming that Topeka schools weren't, in fact, integrated. Finally, in 1993, the court ruled in her favor, forcing new policies to be enacted to ensure the schools' integration. Linda died last March 25 at the age of 76.

Linda is an example of stubborn determination and enduring faith. In her way she was a prophet of the Light, calling sin for what it was and participating in reconciliation hope. She fought her entire life to ensure that children of any color would have the same access to education and the opportunity to learn together, eat together, play together, live life together. She would not give up until that goal was accomplished. She didn't see the absolute end of segregation, she did live to see the end of it within her world of Topeka, Kansas. Unfortunately, true equality is still not experienced everywhere. As recent as 2016 some schools still used loopholes to avoid integration.<sup>3</sup> In many ways darkness still attempts at dimming the Light.

Thomas is right in wanting to probe Jesus' wounds. The Risen Lord cannot be the product of collective hysteria. He is not a ghost. Resurrection is not a world denying experience; it does not erase evil, it conquers it. Thomas is only asking for what the rest of the disciples were granted: to see the wounds Jesus endured on the cross. What he

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<sup>1</sup> It became known as the *Brown vs. Board of Education Case*.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1; John 1

<sup>3</sup>[www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/05/17/478389720/after-50-year-legal-struggle-mississippi-school-district-ordered-to-desegregate](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/05/17/478389720/after-50-year-legal-struggle-mississippi-school-district-ordered-to-desegregate)

wants to experience is Light conquering darkness. That's his condition: "Unless I see the mark(s)..., I will not believe." (John 20:25) After all, who could tell what the rest of the disciples had seen? What they meant for resurrection could very well be altogether different. Jesus' scars of love are necessary signs of his total and faithful commitment to the world. How could a disciple embrace God's mission if God's Son had not embraced our sin distorted humanity? How could one trust if once could not see the suffering sin had produced to his body? Resurrection would simply be an empty word, the trick of a delusional mind at the best. Or worst, it could be the controlling promise of a demanding god or the cruel joke of an oppressive power lord.

That Jesus' physical wounds do not disappear is telling. As he returns to life he could have made his wounds heal and disappear. But Jesus has not come to deny evil but to redeem it; he has not come to condemn or judge the world but to bring salvation (John 3:17; 12:47). Christ returns to his physical body, and yet he is now unlimited by space or time and is without any regret or recrimination while still carrying his wounds. Jesus has not left the human sphere; he is revealing the goal, the fullness, and the purpose of humanity itself, which is "that we are able to share in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), even in this wounded and wounding world. We are predestined for divine life, we are meant to live in the Light.

In the peace and joy of the Spirit of Jesus we are sent to be prophets of reconciliation to a fatally wounded and spiritually depleted humanity. Darkness will not want to enter the Light and those who follow the Crucified and Risen One will suffer the same fate: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too." (John 15:20) So in the world we may carry wounds of faithfulness and trust as we testify with perseverance and stubbornness to a relentless and convincing hope: "we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:3-5) Believers renounce the seductive forces of the world that deny God's supremacy and suppress life; they turn from evil into the saving Light of God (John 17:15).

The fact is, we are invited, with Thomas, not so much to be doubt-free but to believe. There is a Greek word for doubt, and John does not use it. He uses the word *apistos*, or "faithless." Thomas is not a doubter; he is faithless. He says it himself, in front of the other disciples. He doesn't say, "I doubt it." He says, "I will not believe"—unless I see. It's ok to doubt for that signifies a certain uneasiness with what has been announced and sparks further research. "Unfelief" or "faithlessness," instead, is what keeps one ignorant of the true nature of Jesus, a pre-Easter disciple. In fact, according to the

evangelist John, believing in Jesus is just the opposite: it's coming to him, receiving him, and loving him (1:12; 5:43; 8:42). Believing is the maturing product of a faith journey, an intuition of faith that allows one to trust and to grow. In the gospel of John there is progressive seeing that brings one to the Light. But here the Risen Lord is mindful of those, like us, who do not have the benefit of seeing historical signs. Indeed, they are not necessary for the Spirit testifies on behalf of Jesus, and the Word is made plain (John 14:26; 16:13-14).

So with Thomas we want to keep our eyes on Jesus' love scars for they represent the extent of his commitment to suffering humanity. We want to keep before our eyes the result of our sinfulness: our arrogance, narcissism and self-aggrandizement, our stubbornness and indifference to the suffering of others, our greed and materialism, our appetite for power, our failure at listening and our attempt at justifying ourselves even at the cost of relationships and of our very self. A journey into Light will bring us closer to the Word of Jesus and to the center of our truest Self. Here we will not need to touch Jesus' wounds but will be touched by Jesus' mercy. Here at the center we will see and experience divine fellowship, confess our sins and worship the Triune God. Here, out of this heavenly center we will be sent forth to proclaim reconciliation and peace to all of creation, a flavor and morsel of which we have been allowed to taste.

Then in all humility, let us reconsider the gift of the water of Baptism as explained by an ancient catechesis: When we were baptized into Christ and clothed ourselves in him, we were transformed into the likeness of the Son of God. Having destined us to be his adopted sons and daughters, God gave us a likeness to Christ in his glory, and living as we do in communion with Christ, God's anointed, we ourselves are rightly called "the anointed ones." We became "the anointed ones" when we received the sign of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, everything took place in us by means of images, because we ourselves are images of Christ. Christ bathed in the river Jordan, imparting to its waters the fragrance of his divinity, and when he came up from them the Holy Spirit descended upon him, *like* resting upon *like*. So we also, after coming up from the sacred waters of baptism, were anointed with chrism, which signifies the Holy Spirit, by whom Christ was anointed and of whom blessed Isaiah prophesied in the name of the Lord: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor.*

Anointed in such a fashion, let us bring peace and reconciliation to the whole world so that all may be able to say with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Amen