



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE LONGEST NIGHT, DECEMBER 21, 2025
HABAKKUK 2:1-4; PSALM 126; JOHN 20:24-29

MORE THAN ONE PLACE AT A TIME

John 20:24-29 [Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”]

How did we get here? I thought we were getting ready for Jesus’ birth, yet the reading we just heard puts us with a grieving Thomas on the other side of his death. Can we be at both places at the same time? Sure. That’s why many of us are here tonight. We know that birth and death live in the same world. In the case of my Grandpa, he died on the same night that my cousin

delivered a healthy baby boy, in the same hospital just two floors below.

Beginnings and endings don’t always meet that literally. We don’t celebrate or grieve on cue either. Our hellos and our goodbyes overlap in sometimes bittersweet, sometimes searingly painful ways. Joy and loss cross over each other all the time; it’s just hard in this season to acknowledge that.

To be fair, we're not the first to notice this strange "wrinkle in time," to borrow Madeleine L'Engle's phrase. December 21st isn't just the longest night of our year here in the northern hemisphere. Since the 9th century at least, it's also been the Feast of St. Thomas – hence tonight's Gospel reading. Back in the 60s after Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church moved his feast to July 3rd so he wouldn't constantly be overshadowed by Advent. But the Episcopal Church and several others have held onto the traditional date. The voice of our most famous doubter in this moment, on the edge of good news of great joy for all people, adds another layer of depth to our Advent waiting.

Many of us tonight identify with Thomas – with his insistence on the reality of death, his flat refusal to turn it into metaphor or borrow someone else's faith when he knows it won't fit, his sense of being out of step with those closest to him. We too want to see the promise of new life for ourselves. But when that's not possible, what's left for

those of us who have not seen and yet want to believe that the light is coming to meet our darkness too?

Some say our job is to wait and let time heal our wounds. There's some truth here. There are seasons to things, even grief. It's not just poetry to say along with our psalmist that "those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy." God knows, seeds of hope that are planted in a season of loss – be it the loss of a relationship, the loss of a dream, even the loss of a life – it can take a long time before any growth is visible. Growth might still be happening; it might just be happening in the dark. Who knows? We might be developing the roots we'll need for the next storm, but we might not know even that for a while. In the meantime, we cannot make the earth travel around the sun any faster, no matter how good or smart or brave we are. Sometimes waiting for what we cannot do on our own is the most faithful choice we have.

That's usually not our only option, though, in the face of grief or loss. In

this place, in church, we often talk about faith – or trust – in God as something we practice. We try to remember God’s character – the goodness of God - by listening to the stories and songs of those who’ve gone before us. We try letting the long history of God’s faithfulness matter to us now. We try letting the beauty and closeness of creation tell us something important about our Creator – and who we are as created in God’s image. We practice holding onto the One who already holds us, and we pray that the muscle memory we develop in the light will keep us going in the dark.

In other words, we practice being in more than one place at a time. We let gratitude and grief exist in the same

space. We hold our sadness alongside tidings of comfort and joy – without one cancelling out the other. Nothing is erased or made meaningless, even as our wounds gradually fade over time. As for those we love but see no longer, they remain with us – not just through the strength of our memories (which also fade), but by the grace and love of the One who holds them in eternity and who has already made them whole. The veil between time and eternity is thinner than we think, and in places and moments like this – the light does eventually meet our darkness. And the unseen love that binds us all is here, with us, now. Thanks be to God. Amen.



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