

## **“Uncommon Commonality”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
April 7, 2024 - Second Sunday of Easter

[Acts 4:32-35; John 20:19-31](#)

“O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen” (William Sloan Coffin).

Doubting Thomas: This main character of our gospel lesson from John has been remembered most specifically for his disbelief of the other disciples of Jesus’ report to him that they, when Thomas was not with them, had witnessed the risen Christ. Perhaps it would be better if we remembered him not only as the Doubter, but as Fearless Thomas or Bold Thomas or Unbroken Thomas, for the reason he missed out on witnessing Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples in John’s gospel is that Thomas was out and about in public on that day while the other disciples were huddled together in a locked room, fearing that the authorities who had Jesus killed were coming to get them as well.

But as Thomas was no scaredy-cat, he was not there, hiding in fear with the others, when Jesus appeared in their midst, standing among them on the night after his resurrection, and offered them a word of peace. They had already received a report from one of their members, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus had risen, as just that morning, she saw him, spoke with him, and held him. At seeing him among them again for themselves, receiving his gift of peace, and witnessing the scars that remained on his resurrected body, the disciples were no longer frozen in fear or stuck in their sorrow, but were filled with joy.

They also became filled with the breath or spirit of the Risen One as he breathed out upon them, empowering them to continue his earthly work of setting people free from all that binds them and holds them back from experiencing the liberating goodness of God’s grace.

But as Thomas was not with them, for he was already unbound by fear, he missed out on all this. Though the others gave him a report of what they had experienced, just as Mary Magdalene gave them an earlier report of what she had experienced, Thomas had to experience for himself a shared moment with the resurrected Jesus before he would believe. And so, meeting Thomas’s unique

need, Jesus again came to all the disciples, Thomas included this time, the following Sunday. It was then that Fearless Thomas became Faith-filled Thomas when Jesus again spoke a word of peace and then showed Thomas the marks from the wounds upon his body that he had overcome. Thomas's need to experience for himself the risen Christ having been met, he exclaimed in faith, "My Lord and my God!"

In today's first scripture lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, the first of a series of readings we will hear from Acts, which is part two of Luke's gospel and tells the story of how the Spirit- and faith-filled disciples continued the good work of Jesus after his death and resurrection, we read of how faithful Thomas and the other disciples, here called apostles (meaning sent ones), continued to gather together, no longer fearing, no longer doubting, and were leading a growing group of people who followed the selflessly loving way of Jesus. The author of Acts gives us an idealistic depiction of this early Church in action by stating that they received great grace by God and then freely shared that grace with one another, in fact pooling their possessions and holding them all in common, so that there was not a needy person among them. In this community, those who were hungry had food and those who were without shelter were housed. Together, they met one another's needs.

This was an uncommon arrangement in the day, and it remains so, for we do not commonly hold all things in common, sharing everything we have for the good of one another, but this idealized depiction of the Christian community does give us a model for our own living as a community of faith along with all of those around the world who follow the way of Christ. For, just as those first disciples had their needs met by the resurrected Christ, who appeared to them to replace their fear with peace, their unbelief with faith, and their sorrow with rejoicing, and just as those disciples, as they became full of faith and God's power, shared what they had to meet one another's needs, we too can use whatever resources we have, the great grace of God we enjoy in all its forms, to take care of one another and the world around us. And as the living body of Christ, for, as Teresa of Ávila so beautifully stated, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours," we are responsible for continuing the good, need-meeting work of Christ.

This is the calling we share today. As we receive communion a bit later in this service, let us be mindful that this symbolic act reminds us of this calling, that we take in Christ -- not only his sacrifice for us that gives us peace, but his way of sacrificing for one another; not only his love for us, but his way of loving the world; not only his displacement of our fear and doubts with faith, but his way of replacing despair and hopelessness by offering life-giving miracles -- so that we can be prepared to continue Christ's real work of meeting needs for one another and the world.

Today, let us be recommitted to our common calling to be Christ's body and do Christ's work with our own work. When we meet for today's Council meeting, let us be mindful that all of our various groups and ministries are to be about that task. Let us always hold to the uncommon way of sharing all that has been so graciously shared with us to meet the needs of the people in our community, and may we ever join with our brother Thomas in identifying Jesus as Lord and God through our own humble and faithful service. Amen.