

TEXT: John 20:19-31
THEME: Blessed are those who have not seen
SUBJECT: Faith
TITLE: From Certitude to Faith

Second Sunday of Easter
28 April 2019
Messiah Moravian
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Darcey, daughter of a Lutheran minister, traveled a long and winding road from her confirmation through life in the far country to her tentative return to church.

As a young girl she loved imitating her father presiding at Holy Communion. At the end of the summer before she started the second grade, she often went into the basement to stare at the dandelion wine her father was making. She figured if he could make wine out of something as mundane as dandelions, she could use sumac berries.

She picked the fur-covered berries and dropped them into a coffee tin. Adding water from the stream, she stirred the concoction with a stick. The wine was purple-black and Darcey had it under a moldy tablecloth she used as a ceremonial vestment.

With cornflowers stuck in her hair, her brother and their friends gathered around a big rock in a circle of trees behind the rectory. Darcey began the service. She uncovered the coffee can and poured the sumac wine carefully into a coffee cup she took from the kitchen.

Darcey lifted the cup to Mandy's lips, then Greg's, and finally to her brother David's. Each took a sip that dyed the area around their mouths reddish purple. Go in peace, Darcey said, as Greg and Mandy's mother called them to dinner.

By the time Darcey made it home to the rectory, Mrs. Messner had already called Darcey's mother. Greg had told his mom that Darcey forced him to drink the blood of Christ and Mandy identified the berries. Poison control suggested the children drink syrup of ipecac.

Darcey's father left parish ministry to work in a community service agency. Darcey and her brothers were sent to a Lutheran Church where she encountered a presentation of Christian faith that was as far away from her childhood understanding of the living God as a cement block was from a waterfall.

Darcey went off to college, spent a year studying in France, fell in love and stayed in France until her lover loved someone else. Devastated, she returned to the US. She finished college and completed a master's degree in writing. Desire became her life's organizing principle. The intensity of the desire was more important than the object of desire. In fact, she found her desire was stronger if the object was aloof and nihilistic.

After a couple of decades in the far country, the birth of a daughter and the failure of a marriage, she could no longer outrun her longing and loneliness. The vast spiritual wilderness at the center of her life demanded attention. Desperation was driving her search for God.

Darcey found her way to Grace Reformed Church. Many Sundays at Grace the singing, the sermon, and the group prayers seemed to rise up and form a passageway to God. She became

involved in a small group study of a very popular book. Certitude and obedience, not striving for complex meaning, were central to the author's theology. Darcey was frustrated.

On Easter Sunday at Grace Reformed Church, the altar was covered with potted lilies, pink tulips, and daffodils. Rev. Banks began his sermon by coming down out of the pulpit. He declared, "You need to be sure, dearly beloved, absolutely sure . . . Hello! Somebody! Are you positive, absolutely positive?"

Darcey slipped from the pew and walked out of church. On the sidewalk she remembered Jesus' cry from the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" That didn't sound like being absolutely sure.

Who doesn't know the lure of certainty? The risk of faith in what matters most is the greatest risk we can run. We have one life to live. If our trust is misplaced, if faith fails, the meaning of our lives breaks down.

Thomas is not willing to risk his life on something unbelievable. Thomas is not in doubt. The word doubt does not appear in this text. Thomas is absolutely positive he doesn't believe what he has been told. Jesus' invitation to Thomas is to move from unbelief to belief.

But belief in what? Many Jews believed in a general resurrection of the dead, but no Jew believed in a crucified Messiah. Maybe Thomas needed to see the wounds, not to believe God raised the dead, but to believe God identified with one crucified as a criminal.

In seeing the wounds of the risen Jesus, Thomas sees God in a new light. In the light of Easter, Thomas sees a God who embraces the one condemned to die as a blasphemer, one cast out by the religious authorities and judged by the state as a threat to the social order.

Darcey spilled her life story into the lap of Sister Leslie, concluding "At the moment, I am kind of a mess." Sister Leslie, her hands resting palms up, fingers curled between one another like a pink fresh flower, smiled.

Sister Leslie helped Darcey understand that faith means coming to terms with vulnerability and ambivalence, being open to the unknown. Darcey learned that being closer to God would not protect her from pain, sorrow and suffering. The cross is sufficient evidence of that.

The cross, however, is not the end of the story. The resurrection is God's response to the worst that can befall us. The wounds we suffer are not a sign of God's displeasure, of being abandoned by God. Rather, our wounds are the womb of resurrection life. Blessed are those who believe this, for they know hope.