

Sermon, Holy Cross, April 12, 2015 – Jamie Samilio – Doubting Thomas

Disclaimer: I ran this sermon past my spouse and she pointed out that I used the word “you” a lot. 50 times in fact. Let me be clear – I am not preaching at you – I am with you on all of this – I have had my share of wardrobe malfunctions, and that reference will be clear to you in a moment – I am going to share with you a little fashion advice.

How much time did you spend this morning thinking about what you were going to wear? Did it take 30 seconds, because it was clean and “on top?” Did it take a few minutes? Did you try on several things before you found just the right look and fit? Did you pick something to make you feel confident? Professional? Happy? I ask because the Gospel reading caused me to take a closer look at what I am wearing on the outside, how it affects who I am on the inside, and how I relate to other people.

We have all heard it said that some people wear their emotions on their sleeves, so I began to think I should be more careful about what I wear. Because what I put on the outside will eventually become and then reflect what is on the inside.

Indeed, what we as the Body of Christ put on the outside is important -- important, because it is what the world sees, and because it helps frame who we become as people of God.

Just because you can do something, does not mean you should. I am a quick-witted person, and I spent my early 20s stinging people with sarcasm. It was a bit of a game, and it was a game I was good at winning. Much of the time the sarcastic comments I made would make people laugh, and I thought that it was a good thing – being popular and well liked. Then came the ah-ha moment when one day, someone older and wiser said to me, “Sarcasm does not become

you.” Huh, I thought. The comment was made in the context of a critique of the clothing one of my coworkers – so it was interesting to think of sarcasm as something that I was wearing on the outside. I soon realized that sarcasm was not so much clothing as it was armor. Armor I forged to hide behind, to protect me from the world and from anyone getting in.

We do not want our lives and our faith to be bad episodes of “What Not To Wear.” We need to clothe ourselves with love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and peace – the list of what we need to wear to do God’s work is long.

An important note here is to the need to care for our spiritual clothing just as we care for our earthly clothing. Prayer, meditation and worship are the laundry and dry cleaner of our spiritual outerwear.

Hold onto the concept of what we wear on the outside for a moment, because I am going to come back to it.

In the Gospel this morning, Jesus says, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jesus is sending us out to DO the Lord’s work.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” This is really good news—we are not doing the Lord’s work alone or uninspired—we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and unite us – our own personal, spiritual fashion consultant. I have said this often, but here again I say, “What we DO matters.”

All the scripture readings today carry a message about doing God’s work. From the Collect: “Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ’s Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith.” That means our actions need to show our faith to the world. Give us the grace to practice what we believe.

The First Lesson and the Psalm both speak of unity—What we DO, we should DO united with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is where it gets interesting. Right after Jesus bids the Apostles peace and breathes the Holy Spirit on them he says this, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Fantastic, I do not have to forgive the mean people who offend me, excellent – I can have their sins retained. Ha! But wait, there’s more. The thing about retaining sins is this – the people who offended us do not retain the sins we do not forgive – we do. *We* retain the sins we do not forgive. We pack those unforgiven sins into OUR bags and we carry that baggage around – my back hurts just thinking about it.

Forgiveness helps me. It invites God in to work through me. I'm happier, I feel better physically when I'm not burdened with the baggage of unforgiveness. Stress, pressure, resentment and bitterness take a toll on a person. We read from John today, but Mark 11 tells us that when we do not forgive others, it hinders our faith from working.

We reach into our baggage -- what else is packed in there that you put on and wear on the outside? Are we like Thomas in the Gospel? Clearly Thomas reached into his baggage that day and put on his cloak of doubt and a belt of fear. I do not think we ever have doubt without also having fear.

Really however, I think Thomas voiced what some of the others were thinking, even after they had seen Jesus for themselves. Thomas had not clothed himself in trust and faith, instead he put on his doubt and his fear and then faced the Lord – and so do we. Every time we fail to trust, we lose confidence in God and in ourselves, and we can be sure we are wearing fear and doubt. Fear and doubt keeps us from doing the work God has given us to do. Fear and doubt and many

other emotions we clothe ourselves in also shield us from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—anxiety, pride, anger and resentment.

What have you packed in the baggage you carry? What do you need to take along with you on your journey with God, where God will bid you peace and ask you to Love God and your neighbors as yourself.

Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." And that is us, we are BLESSED. Wear confidence on the outside, knowing that you are blessed.

Karen Armstrong is a British author and former Roman Catholic sister. She said, **"Religion isn't about believing things. It's ethical alchemy. It's about behaving in a way that changes you, that gives you intimations of holiness and sacredness."** In other words, what you clothe yourself with can change you on the inside.

I know you have all been waiting to hear the musical reference I would make in this sermon. Here it comes. I went over and over the story of Thomas and I kept trying to imagine how he felt. In the words from Jesus Christ Superstar where Judas is addressing Jesus, **"You'd have managed better, If you'd had it planned. Now why'd you choose such a backward time, And such a strange land? If you'd come today you could have reached the whole nation (the whole world really), Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication."**

Good point – if Jesus came today for the first time, we would have seen it on YOUTUBE, and the crucifixion would have been reported on CNN and Tweeted #INRI. Facebook would have been filled with photos of selfies in front of the empty tomb #risen, and Thomas would have believed because he would have already seen.

Thomas is our main man on the Sunday after Easter, and we have nicknamed him "doubting." Yet in some ways, that name is not really

fair. Thomas was a skeptic and had the guts to push back and ask for proof of the resurrection. Thomas did not want to base his knowledge on hearsay. He demanded physical proof – as I think any of us might. I think there are two camps when it comes to Thomas. One camp unpacks its bag and puts on a cloak of judgment saying, “Shame on you Thomas for your lack of faith.” And some of us put on the pants of righteousness and cheer Thomas for asking to see the wounds – after all if it is true, why can’t we see proof? We want a firsthand account for ourselves, we want to be there, we want to see the evidence for ourselves and experience Jesus firsthand.

I do not think that Thomas was alone in his skepticism – I think he is just the one who pushed the envelope publicly. Remember that Mary came and told the disciples that the tomb was empty, yet they sat in fear with the door locked when Jesus came and freely showed proof of his resurrection – proof that Thomas would also later demand. I think there is more to the story, more wavering belief than the text might indicate. We live in a time when everyone documents just about everything – yet we still watch YOUTUBE for ourselves.

Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again. For us in the here and now, what we wear on the outside, what we do in this world, matters. Remember to clean and care for what you wear on the outside just as you do your earthly clothes.

To avert a bad outfit episode, I have one final reference from Colossians; it is a commentary on what not to wear. I think it is a good packing list for your spiritual journey.

12 “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” Amen

+++

Year B

RCL

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The First Lesson

Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The Response

Psalm 133 Page 787, BCP

Ecce, quam bonum!

1

Oh, how good and pleasant it is, *
when brethren live together in unity!

2

It is like fine oil upon the head *
that runs down upon the beard,

3

Upon the beard of Aaron, *
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.

4

It is like the dew of Hermon *
that falls upon the hills of Zion.

5

For there the LORD has ordained the blessing: *
life for evermore.

The Epistle

1 John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- 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. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Gospel

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them 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."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.