

Sermon Easter2C 2013-04-07

John 20:19-31

*I Eat, Therefore I Believe*

We are, I would bet, familiar with the phrase, “I think, therefore I am.” Rene Descartes’ famous philosophical bumper sticker that locates our existential being in our rational powers. I know I exist, because I am engaged in rational processes. He ultimately moves from *cogito ergo sum*, into a proof of the existence of God, figuring that if he knows he exists because he thinks, he can understand that he didn’t make himself, and ultimately there must be a being that made him.

However, a few problems arise in locating our proof of being in our rational processes... one is, while I know I exist because I can think, I have no idea about the rest of you since I cannot access your thoughts. You might not be thinking at all. Two is closely related. If the essence of our existence is located in our rational thought, what do we make of our senses? Descartes divorces the two. Reason and experience are split. So our rational thought becomes in some way, stuck in a security room, viewing all of the data that comes through our senses. Even if all of our senses were shut off, we would still exist because we would still be capable of reason. But what do we do with our senses? How trustworthy are they? What if they are unreliable? What if pink really is green? What is our favorite food is really poison? What if the safe sidewalk is in actuality a precarious ledge on which we are walking? What if we are really in Matrix-like prison where sensory data is being force fed to us?

It borders on the absurd, but such is the task of most philosophy as philosophers engage and seek to make sense of reality. Many of us are willing to trust our senses, since after all, we still continue to think. If our senses were so unreliable, then I believe we would find our rational processes to stop fairly quickly... unless our rational powers and thus our existence, are not located within our physical bodies... and maybe then we would continue to think anyway... but that is a different question.

But the distrust of senses and experiences and emotions is something that we should not reject outright. After all, Luther would agree to some extent. Lutherans do not typically talk about our subjective experiences. We don’t ask about conversion experiences. We don’t mandate any particular religious affections to know we are truly Christian. We simply point to a particular task that happens when most of us cannot remember it. We point to baptism.

We do not base our identity upon anything that happens within us. Experiences are not entirely trustworthy. When we do have them, they need to be tested. After all, experiences can be manufactured. At the beginning of major sporting events like the Super Bowl, someone sings the national anthem, a large flag is unfurled on the stadium turf, and then the F-16s fly over. Our hearts swell with patriotism. It is not bad, but it is in part manufactured to make us feel a particular way about our country. But our experiences and senses can be exploited in such a way that we become slaves to something: drugs, cults, ideologies... even Starbucks. Much has

been written on the way they seek to craft the experience of being in their store.

Thomas is a bit of a skeptic as well. All of his friends tell him one Sunday afternoon "We have seen the Lord!" And Thomas responds with "You are all crazy! That is not how things work. Dead people do not show up!" Thomas is in some ways right to question his friends. They might be victims of a mass hallucination. Thomas refuses to believe them, but he does leave an opening. He says, "Unless I put my fingers in the marks on his hands, and my hand in his side, I will not believe." It is interesting... the word "put" is weak. He doesn't really just say "put my fingers in those marks"... it is more forceful. The word there is the same that is used for when Jesus casts out demons. "Unless I THRUST my fingers in those scars..." would be a better rendering.

But of course then, Jesus DOES show up again. And Thomas is with them. Here Jesus invites Thomas to stick his fingers in his wounds. His hand in his side. And we never know if Thomas really does it. Jesus merely shows up and offers. Thomas responds with a profound confession "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus acknowledges his confession but offers a mild rebuke of sorts. "Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who have believed and not yet seen!" And there Jesus speaks of us... we who have not seen him, but still believe.

We are not left on our own however. Just because we do not see Christ and the marks of his crucifixion in his body, we should not think that our faith is somehow our own doing. That unlike Thomas we are able to wrangle faith out of nothing. Or dig deep and pull it out of our own being. If God is not involved, we will be unable to know anything. But the witness of scripture consistently points to God coming to us. We are not left on our own. The good news is always that God comes to us. We are not saved by our righteousness, but in the waters of baptism, Christ comes and gives us HIS righteousness. We say that this is an alien righteousness. It is not our own.

Likewise faith is not something buried or inherent in us, but is worked by the Holy Spirit when the good news is proclaimed. Christ likewise gives us knowledge of himself when he shows up in bread and in wine. He is the resurrected one, who sits at God's right hand, which means that wherever God is, there Christ is as well. Therefore he is ubiquitous. Christ makes himself present for us in bread and wine as he promised and there he opens up the reality of the good news because where he is there is also grace and forgiveness.

Christ provides an objective reality, apart from experience, for us, but one which allows for experience as no longer do we ask to thrust our hands in his wounds, but now he thrusts himself into our hands in the bread, and onto our tongues in the wine. All the while our faith is created, strengthened and nurtured so that we might have life in him.

Thanks be to God. Amen

