

((INTRO: different learning styles: visual, aural, tactile: Thomas most famous example))

Consistent tradition says that years after today's event, Thomas the apostle ended up a missionary to India. I see him evangelizing there, telling today's story, one of the climaxes of John's Gospel, again and again.

Sometimes his converts would shake their heads and ask him why he demanded such a shocking, almost brutal proof that Jesus was alive ... that he needed to put his finger in the nail marks and his hand into his side.

He would shrug and smile. "Well, everyone has their own faith story, and I have mine. I've always been a tactile person. Some children believe when you tell them the fire is hot. Others have to put their hand in and feel for themselves. Most of my important learning has been by touch --- touching and being touched.

"What drew me to Jesus in the first place was his touch. He wasn't at all afraid to be touched when people would crowd around him ... and he wasn't afraid to touch. When I first approached him, he laid his hand on my shoulder. That meant a lot to someone like me. But then came more. He looked calmly through my eyes and began spiritually to massage my heart, especially its wounds. I had many. Wounds from growing up, wounds from rude acts of teachers and elders, wounds I'd inflicted on myself. I felt so understood and cherished. I had to follow him.

The worst wound I ever received was Good Friday. The arrogance of the priests wounded me. Pilate's stupid lazy cowardice wounded me. But mostly, Jesus' woundedness, and my inability to do anything, wounded me. I couldn't stand it. I took my wounds, open and bleeding, and ran into the night.

It took courage to go back and find the other apostles; I knew they were wounded as badly as I. But Jesus had taught me to care about people's wounds. So I resolved that I would massage their wounds and we could at least be wounded together.

When they told me he'd risen, I shook my head and said: "One thing and one thing only will convince me: If he lets me touch my finger to the wounds from the nails, if I put my finger in those wounds, and my hand into his side." Jesus understood this need of mine, even if they didn't. Because when he next came, that's exactly what he invited me to do.

When I put my finger into the nail marks, I felt great pain: unspeakable sorrow over the ingratitude of the world and its rejection of the Father's love. Mixed with the pain was something else. Love for sinners. The same love that put him on the cross in the first place, undefeated, undiminished.

But how shall I describe what happened when I put my hand into his side? I reached all the way through to his heart. (Jesus' heart had always been more accessible than other hearts. It remains more accessible to me than my own heart.) Well, when I reached his heart ... it was the most beautiful sensation in my whole life. I felt ... unalloyed, undiminished, unconditional, inexhaustible, unconquerable ... Mercy. Mercy. Mercy enough to go out, enter and heal all the nail prints and broken hearts of the whole world. All I could do was keep sighing, 'My Lord and my God!'

"Some believe what they see. Others what they hear. Some, like me, have to feel to believe. God knows best how to give you enough of Jesus to make you a believer, until he comes in glory. Ask God. You will be given what you need, so that you too can say: 'Jesus is my Lord. Jesus is my God.'"