

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace and peace to you from our risen Lord, who was and is and is to come. Amen. I was struck by something in last week's Easter gospel that has continued to linger in my mind. Early on that first day of the week the women bought spices to anoint Jesus' lifeless body and they ask, "who will roll away the stone for us?" The stone was very large and had become a physical barrier that was in the way.

In today's gospel, just a week later, the men have locked themselves in the house and here is another barrier, a locked door and yet Jesus somehow gets through to meet them there. The women believed a large stone could keep Jesus from getting out and the following week the men thought a locked door could keep someone like Jesus from getting in. We could spend some time this morning thinking about those physical barriers that keep Jesus from breaking out or breaking into our world.

Maybe we need to rethink these barriers. What is it that truly keeps us from having a more active, full faith life? Are the barriers only physical? Or can opening the door to uncertainty actually bring one closer to a living faith? Today encounter Thomas who has his doubts about the risen Jesus. But somehow it's that doubt that draws him into a deeper relationship with the risen Lord. Resurrection breaks through barriers; a great stone is rolled

away, doors are opened, the past is forgiven, fear turns into peace, sadness turns to joy, a broken past becomes a promising future.

Resurrection changes everything! Let me share with you what I think is a resurrection story from NPR's Radio Lab; a broadcast about faith and doubt entitled "rocked by doubt." Lulu Miller was a producer for Radio Lab and she recalls a story about how in her childhood she just loved rocks...playing with rocks...sitting on them...collecting them...she thought of rocks as living things...rocks were her friends.

And then in seventh grade her science teacher taught a lesson on the difference between organic and inorganic matter. He wrote organic on one side of the black board and started listing things like...trees, people, plants, pasta, anything that lives or was once living...these were organic.

Then he drew a line down the board and wrote the word inorganic on the other side and began to list things like metal, salt and rocks...these things never lived, her science teacher told them. They were inorganic. And this made Lulu unhappy because she liked rocks and never thought of them as inorganic, completely devoid of life. But Lulu accepted this new reality and grew up and became a radio producer, while never giving up her love of rocks.

Then she left her job as a producer of the radio show and decided to bike across the country before taking another job and on her journey she would meet someone who would change her mind about rocks forever.

Lulu is pedaling on a stretch of Route 50 in Nevada, known as the loneliest road in America and as she finishes a hundred mile stretch she makes it to a gas station – diner. There she meets Jeff Viniard a fellow traveler and they eat together and ride to the campground a short distance away. Jeff was getting married in a couple of weeks and his fiancée Megan was supposed to be with him on this ride but she got busy with wedding plans so Jeff decided to take the ride by himself.

Jeff had a little backpack guitar and Megan and her friend gathered around the campfire and he began to sing old familiar songs like Amazing Grace and tell stories. They learned Jeff had recently graduated with a master's in geo sciences. Jeff grew up in a devout Christian home in Kentucky. Jeff's grandfather was a preacher. He and Megan were both very devout and religious. The two had met in church and they became closer on a mission trip down to Louisiana. Faith was central to their relationship and the presence of God was a very important component of their life together.

Jeff ended up spending the next eleven days riding with Lulu and her friend as they peddled across America. And about three days into their

travels together, somewhere in Utah, Lulu picked up a rock and shows it Jeff (remember he has a master's degree in geology) and what he said next completely changed what she thought about the world. Jeff washed the rock off with water and explains that it was limestone, made up of tiny microscopic shell fish and plankton that falls to the bottom of the ocean and then is compressed over time under immense pressure. It's what's called a sedentary rock.

And all Megan needed to hear. Rocks aren't dead, inorganic objects; some are made up of once living organisms. The rock she was holding in her hand was made up of thousands of organisms that were once alive. In a very real, tangible way, some rocks come from what was once living and it's what Megan needed to hear. Jeff changed Lulu's world view about rocks...some rocks were once living!

But that's not the end of the story. They continue to ride across Utah peddling through one of the hardest parts of the trip and when they get to Cedar City they decide to go out for pizza to celebrate. That's when Jeff, who was usually pretty quiet and polite, slams down his root beer and exclaims, "I was supposed to be getting married today!" It shocks Lulu and her friend and then they hear why Jeff's fiancée Megan really is not riding with him.

A few months ago Jeff and Megan were cooking a meal together in Megan's apartment and as Jeff explains it, there was this sudden pain in his chest and with this pain comes this realization that he didn't believe in God anymore. Megan sensed something was wrong and the feeling went on for a couple of weeks and finally Jeff had to admit to Megan that he just didn't believe in God anymore.

Megan's worldview was shattered. She said her future husband had to share her faith...believing in God had to be part of their relationship. She didn't think she could marry someone who couldn't believe in the presence of God. So Jeff was biking across the country trying to find God.

Once while peddling up a very steep hill...it seemed as if there was a wind sort of pushing him up the hill but it wasn't a strong enough sign...Jeff needed a stronger more concrete experience of God. Jeff had given God an ultimatum that God show himself so he could believe. And it had to happen on this bike trip.

Lulu and her friend and Jeff went their separate ways after eleven days of biking together. And it was a year later that Jeff called Lulu. He was on a road trip and asked if he could stay with her the night as he was passing through. So after some small talk Lulu asked Jeff what had happened with his relationship with Megan and had he found God again?

Jeff told a story about how he was just a couple of days from the end of his ride. It was just after Lulu and her friend had left him and he was depressed and still looking for a sign and he went into an Arby's and ordered a sandwich and sat down to eat it....and as he was sitting there a plaster tile from the drop ceiling fell right on down on him and his sandwich. The guy sitting in the next booth came over and sat with him and gave him his sandwich and listened to his story and his searching for God and his strained relationship with his fiancée.

The man who gave him his sandwich and listened to his troubles happened to be a minister and when he was about to leave, he gave Jeff a sort of blessing or benediction telling him to stay safe and have a good rest of his ride...and it felt good, but it still wasn't the sign Jeff was looking for. So when he met up with Megan after his bike ride across the country he had to admit he was still confused about God and Megan thought about it for a couple more days and then broke off the engagement.

Jeff moved to Columbus Ohio and found work in a bike shop. It was a far cry from a career in geology. By now he was supposed to be married with a good career. Lonesome and alone he joined a church, not so much to find faith, but to just be around some familiar people. He joined the choir because he missed singing. And then one regular day in worship...he doesn't remember what the sermon was about or what music was

sung....but he was taking communion. And it seemed like the air was charged and something about the environment was different this day as he received the host....and it happened again...that pain in his chest...but this time it felt like a hand was holding his heart....and he felt in that moment the true presence of God.

Another year went by and Lulu got a surprising invitation in the mail. It was to Jeff and Megan's wedding. They finally decided there is all this uncertainty in the world and having an abiding life of faith is not always about certainty and Jeff is still trying to figure out his faith. It's scary and confusing but both say, "we are ok with that."

On a day to day basis they pray together and talk about their faith and their doubts and have still their differences, their ups and downs...but what they have...they decided is good enough. In the end love is a choice and they are just going to take one day at a time and move forward.

And if you think about it...isn't that the gospel story...a group of disciples grapple with the message that Jesus who was crucified is not dead he is living and has gone ahead of them...people meet him on a road....in a meal....as a story is remembered...and we muster up enough courage to be shaped by the story and in our relationships with each other...in the end isn't it really about how we love? In our faith mixed with doubt we strike up the courage to proclaim...he has risen!