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The Easter season is meant to be a joyful one. One where we celebrate the coming spring and the resurrection of Jesus. Two reminders of new beginnings and the restoration of life. I don't know about you, but I certainly have been struggling to embrace the joy of the Easter season this year. The world, both globally and more locally, can seem very bleak these days. Perhaps these are feelings some of you can relate to as well. I hope you will stay with me as I discuss my journey to try and find that Easter joy.

In Acts we read, "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... There was not a needy person among them" Reading this I felt a deep kinship to Thomas from our readings this week thinking, "I'll believe that when I see it".

Perhaps it's not that I doubted that this could have happened in the earliest years of Christian formation, but that we could see something similar to this in the current day and age. Certainly we have seen cities that have tried things like universal basic income or have moved towards restorative practices that help support the wellbeing of the whole community. Some of which have been very successful and have created a model for other places attempting to do the same. To me at least, these have seemed like practices that are often only possible because they were on a small scale. Trying to convince a majority of people that caring for everyone in their community also lifts them up? Nearly impossible.

If we consider the need in our own church community we see that New Haven has a low-income rate amongst adults of 49%, and if you are under 17 that rate jumps to 61%. Meaning there are over 77,000 people right here in our neighborhoods that are struggling to make ends meet. In last year's community wellbeing report they calculated New Haven's community index. A figure that helps to show community vibrancy and economic growth. They found that in New Haven's high-income neighborhoods they scored 770 points out of the possible thousand. A pretty good number. While the low-income neighborhoods only scored 192 of 1,000. One of the lowest ranking scores you could get.

Don't worry I am not going to ask everyone here to sell all their possessions like the people in Acts, though many of us could do with less. I talk about it more as a way to exemplify why I have felt like a doubting Thomas. If this is what our own neighbors are going through, how can we expect to make large scale changes? Luckily for you all this is where a majority of the doom and gloom ends.

I want to talk about a conversation I listened to recently between Senator Corey Booker and Jon Stewart on race. I am over a year late but I would still recommend watching or listening to it if you haven't already. Near the end of the interview Booker tells a story of a time when a man experiencing homelessness had asked him and a friend for a pair of socks. He didn't have any extra with him so apologized and said that. As he was about to leave Booker's friend stops and takes off the socks he is wearing and gives them to the man. This small act seemed to make his day. Booker says "this wasn't a congressional debate. This was one moment to touch another human being, and I didn't have the moral imagination to take off the damn socks."

This comment really stuck with me. It even seemed to challenge me to ask myself, when have I not had the moral imagination to try and help someone I easily could have. Booker seems to further challenge me by going on to say "we can externalize this as much as possible, but it all comes down to how we engage with the world."

I have gone back to these ideas quite a few times in the last few days. It helped me to realize that I have been so externally focused on what a mess our world seems to be I lost sight of what I am doing or could be doing. Getting bogged down in my own all or nothing thinking. Not giving credit to the thousands of lives that have been affected in those communities that had the willingness to try and help each other. Haven't all systematic changes started at the community level first? This doesn't mean that the large-scale issues are not just as important, but if that is all you can see you will miss the opportunities to make a real difference where you are at, in this moment.

I know that I will never be perfect at remembering how I engage with the world is the most important part, but I have been making a more intentional effort. I challenge all of you to consider how you might stretch your own moral imaginations as you look at your communities this Easter season.

Amen.

