Almost always—and I say “almost” only because I try to avoid saying “always” and “never”—*almost* always on this Second Sunday of Easter I focus my sermon on either Thomas or our Lord himself.

And with obvious good reason. There is a great story here with two main characters. Jesus is . . . well, Jesus . . . and Thomas is a stand-in for all of us. He questions first the group and then Jesus himself, demanding proof of Jesus’ identity and proof of his death as a prerequisite for his believing them.

Jesus is once again more generous than anyone could expect, indulging Thomas’s reasonable, though pushy, request.

There’s a lot more in those two figures, and it’s little wonder that most of us preachers concentrate on them most years.

But something happened to me this year when I first looked over today’s propers. It started right off with the Collect, as if certain words and phrases had been written in italics or in red ink:

1. The “new covenant of reconciliation”
2. “Fellowship” followed by “show in their lives what they profess by their faith:

The collective nous and pronouns began to jump out at me: *fellowship, their* faith, *their* lives.

Then in Acts

* The *whole group* . . . were of one heart and soul . . . no one [person] claimed private ownership . . . grace upon *them all*
. . . not a [single] needy person among them.

About now you might be thinking, well, *duh*, or, more kindly, “That Michael—what an amazing grasp of the obvious. Maybe the pandemic has been too much for him.”

And it’s hard to argue with that, but bear with me here.

The brief passage from John’s letter is full of “we’s” and “fellowship’s”. Even more, he says, “Our whole point in declaring to you what we’ve seen and heard is so we can have *fellowship together*.

And this reading from John’s gospel brims with a sense of community. Jesus comes to the place where the disciples had *met* and said to them, collectively and repeatedly, “peace be with you” [plural] and breathed on them all.

Of course there is our single outlier—Thomas—who didn’t happen to be with the others on that first day. (We’re not told why.) And, yes, Jesus did take careful pains with that one individual and his blessedly skeptical nature, but he did even that in the midst of the group assembled for the second episode. It didn’t happen on the road, alone, as with Paul, which is another story in itself. Jesus makes it clear that Thomas represents a whole bunch of people, including those yet to come, such as you and I. And the point was that reconciliation from the Collect, to make sure that Thomas and the others have this experience in *common*.

Whatever else we might surmise, it certainly seems from this perspective that right from the start the church is meant to be all of us in fellowship and community with each other—sharing our material goods, caring for each other, enjoying each other’s company.

For over a year now we’ve been in each other’s company in a way entirely unforeseeable by Jesus and his companions in the first century. Well, by us in the twentieth. Try five years ago, for most of us. It has not been ideal, but it has been a testament to the resilience of God’s people, to our Spirit-sparked imagination, to find a way to be together.

Now we are preparing to be together in the way we have longed for—in the same physical space, celebrating Holy Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion from which we have been separated for over a year.

And even in that return to that physical fellowship so front-and-center in today’s readings, we will continue to offer the fruits of what we’ve learned this past year, making it possible for others to join us via the medium we’re using today. Fellowship in as many forms as we can offer, by God’s grace.

When we do celebrate (and I use the word advisedly) together again on May 16 we will be reunited in that mystical body by that Blessed Sacrament which makes us, all together, one Body with those who gather that day and all who have gone before us and all who are yet to come. + + +