

Second Sunday of Easter, C  
Acts 5:27-32  
Psalm 118:14-29  
Revelation 1:4-8  
John 20:19-31

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Whenever something dramatic happens, there's an adjustment time that follows, as we process what it means.

When Aaron and I got married, over 27 years ago, the wedding was a huge event, of course. Then came the adjustment time, getting used to sharing a home and sharing a life. I remember worrying about little things, like "Oh no, now I've got somebody who actually expects me to carry on a conversation at the breakfast table! Is this what married people do?" But in time we settled into our routines, we began to discover what being partners in life would mean for us.

Graduating from high school or college is a great achievement... then there's what comes next, what you do with your training, how you live your adult life. The birth or adoption of a child is an amazing high point, followed by processing what it means to be parents, be a family. A big birthday comes along – friends help you celebrate turning 30, or 50, 80, even 100! -- and after the big day comes the process of discovering... so this is what being 60 looks like, this is what I can do with my energies in this stage of life.

It seems to me that this is the kind of place we are, this Sunday following Easter, and it's a blessed place to be. We've celebrated the high festival of Christ's Resurrection, a homecoming after pandemic, a miracle really. The tomb is empty! Death is defeated! And now, we have the opportunity to unpack what Christ's resurrection mean to us, a week out, or even 2000 years out, and how we live Christ's resurrection in our own lives.

I realize there are many people who just can't believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. There are even some Christian scholars who say the resurrection appearances of Jesus must have been visions, not actual encounters with a risen being. But I have to be honest and say, I do believe Jesus rose from the dead. I believe Jesus actually returned to life and made himself available to people in some kind of bodily form. I don't know what that looked like exactly, but I believe it. I know God can accomplish anything, so why not believe that God achieved this amazing, unique event? Christ's resurrection is

the cornerstone of my faith. But it's okay that people are in different places with how they understand and receive it. God meets us wherever we are.

It's helpful to realize that even in the Bible itself, the people around Jesus were in a variety of places with how they received his resurrection. The women at the tomb last Sunday – they were terrified. Struck silent. Paralyzed with shock. Some people those women told about the resurrection just dismissed it out of hand, an idle tale, wishful thinking. Even those who met the risen Jesus in person had a variety of reactions – both great joy and fear (Mt 28:8). Some worshipped him, some doubted (Lk 28:16). “In their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” (Lk 24:41)

The disciples were not immediately trusting and certain. Everyone processed the resurrection as best they could. And I'm so glad scripture has preserved their stories – especially the story of Thomas.

People often call Thomas a “doubter,” which has a connotation of judgment or shame that really isn't appropriate. Thomas was simply being honest with his questions – and at no time did Jesus ever judge or condemn him.

Thomas was a realist. He'd seen plenty of people killed on Roman crosses, and he'd never seen one person come back to life. He was bold enough – you could even say, trusting enough—to let both his friends and God know that he needed to see Jesus in person. The others had their encounter with the risen Christ – Thomas needed his own encounter with the Risen Christ. He was bold to say, “*Yes, I want to follow you, Lord, but somehow you are going to have to let me know who you are and what you want from me.*” In this way, Thomas was a lot like us. We admire his directness.

And look how Jesus honored Thomas's spoken need. What did Jesus do?

*Jesus came to Thomas.* Even locked doors couldn't keep him out.

*Jesus stood among the disciples.* He didn't stand apart, he stood with them, among them.

*Jesus blessed them.* “Peace be with you.” God's peace center you and calm your fears.

*Jesus invited Thomas to touch and know him.* He didn't say, Here, take a look and believe! Instead: Touch me, experience what is real and true.

Jesus met Thomas's need, so graciously, with never a word of judgment. And then – wonderfully – Jesus spoke a word *directly to you and me*:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Jesus was speaking to you and me! We haven't seen Jesus in person, but yet we believe, we hold hope within us. And Jesus blesses us. “Blessed are you people who come to worship the Sunday after Easter with a spark of faith in your heart! Blessed are you who come to the table of Holy Communion seeking me! Blessed! Blessed are you!” I hear pure grace. I hear Jesus saying, “I am coming to you, today, even through thick walls and closed doors, I am coming to stand among you, I am offering myself to you, today, making you one with me, making you part of a love that is stronger than death.”

We Christ-followers can sometimes be so hard on ourselves. It's almost like we search for ways to disqualify ourselves from God's love. We worry we don't measure up to God's standards of goodness. We worry our faith isn't strong enough or our belief pure enough. But there is no such thing as perfect faith, not on this earth.

No human faith can ever grasp the vastness of who God is. God's goodness will always be greater than any person can comprehend... God's love will always be more far-reaching than we can imagine... And God's forgiveness and acceptance will always be wide enough and gracious enough to bring simple, fallible, broken human beings like ourselves into God's presence and love.

The story of Thomas reminds us that our own doubts, our own questions, our own reservations, our own fears – none of these can in any way dim God's goodness and God's saving work. God just keeps on loving this world, and loving us—beyond death, in spite of sin, forever and ever, Amen. That's what Easter is about.

Those of us who yearn for God can invent a million ways to disqualify ourselves (or others!) from God's love. But God disqualifies no one. In Matthew there's a passage I've often puzzled over:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

(Matthew 7:7-8)

Here's what I believe it means. I believe it means that no person who searches for God will come up empty. No person who seeks the risen Lord will fail to receive Christ's presence. Because it's not finally about our finding God, but about God finding us. And that's exactly what God has done in Christ.

I believe that when any person comes to God with an open heart – when you come to God with an open heart, saying "I want to see Jesus" -- you will see Jesus. God will not fail to reveal the Risen Lord to you in some way.

Maybe you'll see a vision; maybe you'll feel a sense of peace or hope; maybe you'll meet someone who helps you learn something about being God's person; maybe a task will be revealed to you, a way to share, to help, to work for justice, to care for the earth, a way to be a part of Christ through doing. You will see Jesus, somehow. Just like Thomas did.

I invite you. Our Lord invites you, to open your heart to the Risen Jesus and receive God's eternal love anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.