

Sermon 2nd Easter
John 20:19-31
April 27th, 2025

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

It's still Easter! And (spoiler alert!): it will be Easter for another 6 weeks. But I have to admit that I feel somewhat deflated after last Sunday, the glorious Easter Sunday; celebrating is exhausting! And then we go back to 'normal', and have to deal with the barrage of bad and scary news that continues to rain down on us. And I have to say that the news about Pope Francis' death last Monday hit me more than I expected – he sure wasn't perfect, but he had the soul of a servant, and advocated for the poor and the marginalized, putting people before dogma. I appreciated that about him. He seemed to be a true human being. And I hope and pray that the next pope will be a true shepherd of the people, humble and courageous.

But back to the subject of feeling deflated after Easter Sunday. I saw a great tagline somewhere on Facebook last week: He is risen! Now what?

Good question, isn't it? Now what? What do we do with the amazing news that Christ conquered death and the grave? What do we do with the amazing news that God offers us and all creation a new life?

How do we convey this message in a world, where so many life-denying forces are at work? Forces that feed on fear and insecurity and suspicion and envy and a feeling of superiority and exceptionalism? I don't have to tell you that the Easter promise of new life to the fullest for all is still far from being fulfilled – that we even seem to move away from it, little by little, day by day - that we are still waiting for God's kingdom to come.

Now I take comfort in the fact that I am not the only one who feels challenged by the aftermath of Easter. We just have to look into today's gospel story to find a similar attitude among Jesus' disciples. Today's gospel story begins on the evening of resurrection day – it's still Easter Day. Maybe 12 hours have passed since Mary Magdalene proclaimed the good news of Jesus' resurrection among his disciples: he is risen!

He is risen – now what? – the disciples seem to ask. All this is absolutely unexpected, they don't know what to do with this information, they can't imagine

what their new life post crucifixion - and resurrection - might be like. All they have experienced is trauma and violence and death and grief. And nothing seems to have changed for the better. Jesus' resurrection hasn't changed the political situation in Jerusalem, Pilate and the Romans still call the shots, there is still the threat that the disciples might be arrested and tried and killed themselves as followers of someone who was unjustly tried and executed. Seemingly Christ's resurrection hasn't changed a thing. Now what?

The disciples play it safe. They hide. Some or all of them may even doubt the good news Mary shared with them. And even if they believe Mary's testimony, the news hasn't changed their lives – yet. It takes a dramatic intervention by Christ himself to stir them up – and that's what we hear about in today's gospel story. He sneaks in on them, locked doors are not an obstacle. He breathes on them as he says the reassuring words, 'Peace be with you!' He shows them: it is I! He clearly identifies himself by showing the wounds he sustained on the cross. **Then**, we hear, then they rejoiced when they saw the Lord. We tend to single out poor Thomas for not trusting the witness of the other disciples that Jesus has risen, he even has become the proverbial doubting Thomas, but, to be fair to Thomas, all of the disciples need something more than just a verbal testimony, mere words, to believe.

Back to the ten who were there on that evening of Easter Day. If you listen carefully to the story: even the sight of Christ himself hasn't really changed their attitude. It's still, 'now what?' For we hear that, a week later, there they are again, in the same house, with the same locked doors. They are still hiding. However, this time, Thomas is with them. The ten who were there the first time Christ told Thomas about their encounter - that Christ is risen, indeed. But Thomas seems to be thinking, 'Yeah, right; so why are you still hiding? You **say** he's alive, but why do you **act** as if he was still dead?' And I don't blame Thomas. The others are just as clueless and confused as they were a week ago.

Again, Christ appears, again, he breathes on the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit, and he shows the marks of his suffering and death to Thomas, just as he showed them to the other ten before. It is then that Thomas can proclaim, 'My Lord and my God!' It is then Thomas' doubt and denial are eradicated once and for all. This is real.

But, spoiler alert, even this encounter doesn't turn the disciples' lives around immediately. It takes one more appearance by Christ before the disciples understand that they are on a mission: to continue the work Jesus has started. To take care of the poor and vulnerable. To proclaim the kingdom of heaven in word

and deed. To speak a word of defiant hope to all who suffer from various demons and oppression – and we will hear more about that next week.

Jesus says to his followers at the first encounter, ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you – this is how it continues!’ But it takes a while for this mission to sink in – and then be carried out. But once the first disciples catch on, they are unstoppable. And they inspire countless other followers of Christ to help spread the kingdom of God through their words and actions – like Pope Francis, and so many more.

Now I want to touch on one more thing. Jesus says to Thomas in today’s gospel, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’. Those words have often be interpreted as an appeal to blind faith. I have trouble interpreting those words this way, especially in the context of the entire gospel according to John, which is all about seeing, about comprehending, about experiencing God in Christ. And Jesus himself commissions his disciples to **show** forth God’s love in word and deed, so that others may come to believe.

I don’t think the risen Christ calls his followers to blind faith. History has shown that blind faith in any ideology or leader can have catastrophic consequences. When we put on our blinders and are just focused on a certain thing or a certain outcome, we lose sight of everything and everybody around us and often leave a path of destruction as we plow on to reach our goal.

No, we have to keep our eyes and ears and minds and hearts open at all times. We mustn’t believe blindly what politicians or the media or those who make a profit in this world tell us. Doubt is good, because doubt keeps us on our toes and also keeps us open to all kinds of different possibilities around us. Thomas and the other disciples doubted, which probably was a prudent thing to do under the circumstances.

And I assume that none of us has come to the faith blindly. Something we saw and experienced made us believe at some point in our lives that Christ is risen and the kingdom of God is growing among us. Maybe it was divine intervention through God’s Holy Spirit. Maybe it was the faith our grandparents or parents passed on to us. Maybe it was in the community of the saints we encountered at church that we came to believe. Maybe it was through the merciful and compassionate deeds of strangers. We all witnessed something, somehow, that made us believe.

And guess what? Now it is up to us to give witness to the God who gives new life. It is up to us, like it was up to the disciples after the resurrection of Christ, and countless followers of Christ ever since, to embody Christ in this world and continue Christ's work. To take care of the poor and vulnerable. To proclaim the kingdom of heaven in word and deed. To speak a word of defiant hope to all who suffer from various demons and oppression. For Jesus' words still are valid for us today as they were for the disciples roughly 2,000 years ago: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

Christ is risen – and bestows his peace and encouraging and empowering Spirit on **us**. We have received new life. A life in Christ, in which we are sent to do God's work. He is risen – now that's what!

Amen