

B Easter 2 4.7.24

John 20:19-31

Focus Statement: Jesus comes for us as many times as it takes.

Christ is Risen! [pause]. Your response is, “Christ is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.” Let’s try that again. Christ is Risen! “Christ is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.” There we go! It’s Easter Sunday friends! I know last week was Easter Sunday, but so is this week. And the next week, and the week after that. And every Sunday until we get to Pentecost, which is May 19th, mark your calendars. Though, honestly, every Sunday is like a little Easter, because every Sunday we come together to meet around the bread and the wine and celebrate Christ’s resurrection. But that’s a longer liturgical argument. The point is, today is definitely still Easter.

It’s still Easter, but the lilies are gone. It’s still Easter, but there aren’t trumpets. It’s still Easter, but there wasn’t a brunch—though, this is Trinity, there’s still coffee hour, there’s still snacks, but the point is, it’s still Easter, but it doesn’t feel as Eastery as last week.

It doesn’t feel as Eastery as last week, and maybe you’re wondering what difference Easter made anyway. Guys, I’ll tell you, I thought about this because, for a whole bunch of silly, annoying reasons, this week was tough. I didn’t have email on Thursday, because our server merged with another server and the whole thing shut down. I had several meetings that could have been emails. Though, in retrospect, I didn’t have email, so maybe those were blessings in disguise. I wanted to swim between work and a night meeting, but the pool at the Y was packed and I hadn’t brought other workout clothes. It was a week of

weird annoyances. And not that any of these things are earth-shattering, when they layer up, it's just frustrating.

And then there's the big things. My week was small, silly, stuff, but some of you are carrying big things. New or continuing illness for yourself or someone you love. Broken relationships. Personal struggles. There's stuff, right? There's stuff we carry, stuff that weighs us down, and it's hard and it's heavy, and Easter is just a Sunday where we hear good music and eat good food and what difference does the resurrection have in our lives?

Did any of this matter is the exact question Mary, the disciples, and eventually Thomas have in the twentieth chapter of John's Gospel. Not the resurrection, unless us and our two thousand years of knowledge, they didn't know about that yet. But they had been following Jesus everywhere he went for three years. And now he was dead, and his followers were in hiding, legitimately in fear of both the religious and Roman authorities who had captured and killed Jesus, and they were wondering, did any of this matter? Or did all our hopes just die on a cross and be buried in an unused tomb?

Our reading started, "When it was evening on that day." That day is the day of the Resurrection. Which in John's account, has Mary Magdalene crying outside the tomb because she thinks someone has taken Jesus' body. As she was crying, she was approached by Jesus, but in her grief she didn't recognize him and thought he was the gardener. Until he said her name, "Mary," and she recognized him, and he sent her to tell the disciples. So she went and announced to them, "I have seen the Lord." So it's "evening on that day, the

first day of the week, [when] the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked” as I mentioned earlier, because of their entirely legitimate fear of both the Roman and religious officials who had had a hand in the death of Jesus. The English translates it as “Jews,” but that’s a bad translation. Jesus was Jewish, all his disciples were Jewish, everyone who lived in Judea was Jewish, because Jewish in first century Jerusalem was less a religious identity than it was an ethnic one. They weren’t afraid of each other, they were afraid of Pilate, the chief priests, and the Pharisees, and all the power players who had shown their hand in crushing the Jesus movement. And even though Mary had said to them, “I have seen the Lord,” when Jesus came and stood among them, they, like Mary, in their grief, could not recognize him. Until he showed them his hands and his side. Then, just like he had said it would back in John chapter sixteen during the Farewell Discourse, their weeping turned to joy, and they “rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”

But Thomas wasn’t there. The text doesn’t tell us why, maybe he hadn’t made his way back across the city from wherever he’d been hiding during the Sabbath, maybe he was out getting food or running other errands, maybe he was taking a nap. We don’t know where he was, only that when Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas was somewhere else. We know Thomas was loyal to the movement, my favorite Thomas story is from chapter eleven, when the other disciples were trying to talk Jesus out of returning to Bethany to bring Lazarus back from the dead for the very legitimate reason of, and this is a quote, this is chapter eleven, verse eight, “Rabbi, the religious leaders were just now trying to stone you.” So, like, maybe not a great time to return. But Thomas, on the other hand, his response,

chapter eleven, verse sixteen, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” This is the kind of disciple Thomas is.

But he wasn't there, when it was evening on that first day of the week, when Jesus showed himself to the others. So when they said to Thomas, just as Mary had said to them, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas asked for the exact same thing they had received before they could believe. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Jesus showed his hands and his side to the other disciples, and it was only after that which they believed, all Thomas was asking for was the same level of clarity as the others.

One week later, same room, same locked doors, only this time Thomas was there, Jesus again came and stood among them. And without even asking, Jesus immediately held his hands out to Thomas. “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.” And before we go further, let's pause right here for a quick Greek lesson, because this is an important detail. The word frequently translated as “belief” in the Gospel is *pistos*. And belief really isn't the best translation of it. Because in English, belief is head knowledge, right. When we believe something, when we think something is true, that's an intellectual activity. But *pistos* is heart knowledge, it's that knowing that defies our intellect. It's more like trust. Trust isn't in our heads, it's in our hearts, or really even more in our guts. You can trust someone, all logic to the contrary. And similarly, there are certain people we just know in our guts are not to be trusted, there's just something wrong. That's *pistos*, this word translated as belief.

And the word translated as doubt. The Greek there is *apistos*, the opposite word. So a better translation here is not so much doubt and belief as it is unbelieving and believing, or even more don't be untrusting, but be trusting. Because doubt, skepticism, if you think about it, are not the opposite of belief. If you don't believe something, you don't have doubts, you just don't believe. I doubt it's going to rain today, but it's Michigan, I wouldn't put money on it. But, if I drop this binder on the floor, I don't believe it will not fall and will instead hit me in the face. Because that's not how gravity works. Right, that's the difference between doubting and disbelieving.

So Jesus showed Thomas his hands and his side, and said to him, "don't be untrusting, but be trusting." To which Thomas, without actually putting his finger in the mark of the nails or his hand in his side, notice. All things Thomas said he would have to do to believe, immediately responded, "My Lord and my God." My Lord and my God, this deep declaration of faith in Christ's identity. Thomas didn't need something more or greater than the others. He just needed the same clarity that Jesus had shown to Mary and to the other disciples, and Jesus gave him that. Jesus came back and gave Thomas what he needed to believe, to trust in the resurrection. Just like he'd come back to the disciples behind the locked doors, even though Mary had told them, "I have seen the Lord." Just like Jesus had come back for Mary, when she stood weeping in disbelief outside his empty tomb, when he called her name so that she would recognize him. Jesus came back so that the disciples could be believing, and could "have life through his name."

Jesus came back for Mary, for the disciples, and for Thomas, and Jesus comes back for us. That's what the rest of this passage was about. After Thomas's confession of faith, Jesus said to him, "have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe." Dear people of God, that's us. We are the people who have not seen the risen Christ. We have not had the opportunity to put our fingers in the mark of the nails of his hand or to put our hands in his side. The resurrected Christ has become the ascended one, and he is seated at the right hand of the Father, not roaming around the earth popping up behind locked doors anymore. We cannot have the resurrection certainty that Jesus gave when he appeared to Mary, to the disciples, and to Thomas, because Jesus is not here on earth in the same way any longer.

We cannot have the experience the disciples had, and this text assures us that we don't need to. We don't need to because, while "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book... these are written so that you may come to believe... and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Dear people of God, just like he did for Mary, for the disciples, for Thomas, Jesus comes back for us, so that we may come to believe, and through that believing, trusting, knowing, have life in his name. The Word, which was with God, which was God, before the world began. The Word that became flesh and lived among us, that Word has become word again. Words written for us, so that the stories of God's promise to God's people continue to be known and told and shared, and we continue to be transformed by them. Your feelings, your questions, your intellectual ascent to this promise, none of that matters to the God who in

Christ Jesus comes to us, again and again, so that we may have life. That you are here today, makes today Easter. Everytime you pray, it is Easter. Everytime you share in fellowship with each other, do God's work in the world, show care and compassion, it is Easter. Everytime you doubt if any of this made a difference, or wonder if it matters at all, that too is Easter. Because it is everything. Our hopes and our fears, our doubting and our trust, our tears and our joy, that Christ comes. Thanks be to God. Amen.