

Sunday, April 3

Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said 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.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



Dear disciples of Jesus:

Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is one of my favorite paintings, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* is by the Italian Baroque master Caravaggio, c. 1601–1602. This master work is in the Sanssouci Palace, now a museum, in Potsdam, Berlin, Germany.

It shows the episode that gave rise to the term "Doubting Thomas", which had been frequently represented in Christian art since at least the 5th century, and used to make a variety of theological points.¹ According to St John's

Gospel, Thomas the Apostle missed one of Jesus's appearances to the Apostles after His resurrection, and said "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." John 20:25. A week later Jesus appeared and told Thomas to touch Him and stop doubting. Then Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:21

In the painting, Thomas's face shows surprise as Jesus holds his hand and guides it into the wound. The absence of a halo emphasizes the corporeality of the risen Christ.

The painting expresses dramatically how Thomas was guided by the risen Christ to really touch him and feel the reality of his wounds.

Luther talking about the suffering and resurrection of Christ preached that "Christ himself pointed out the benefit of his sufferings and resurrection when he said to the women in Matthew 28:10: "Fear not: go tell *my brothers* that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me." These are the very first words they heard from Christ after his resurrection from the dead,... he calls his disciples *his brothers and sisters*,...The risen Christ waits not until we ask or call on him to become his *brother or sister*. Do we here speak of merit, by

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_\(Caravaggio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_(Caravaggio))

which we deserve anything? What did the apostles deserve? Peter denied his Lord three times; the other disciples all fled from him;... Jesus should have called them deserters, *traitors*, betrayers, reprobates, anything but *not brothers...*”²

This is the reason why these words are full of all comfort, since Christ receives *sinner*s as you and I but calls us *his brothers and sisters*.

The title of being Christ’s brothers *and sisters* is so high that the heart of any human being cannot understand it. If the Holy Spirit bestows not this grace, none can say: Christ is my brother.³

But we are now brothers and sisters of Christ and we can enjoy Christ’s victory over death as our own victory in Christ. Because he lives, we can live also!

We can live as witnesses of the resurrection of Christ.

Now going back to our Easter season, we can find that “the texts for today explore what it means to be a witness: the power of seeing and experiencing the resurrection firsthand. For those of us who weren’t there in person to witness Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension, a question persists: How do we give witness? How have we experienced Easter firsthand? What do we need to see, to touch, to hear in order to believe?

The witness given in our readings today is extraordinary because “doubting” Thomas comes up with one of the most powerful, concise creeds in all of

2 http://www.martinluthersermons.com/Luther_Lenker_Vol_2.pdf THE FRUIT AND POWER OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION. By M. Luther.

3 Idem.

scripture declaring to Christ; Jesus you are: “My Lord and my God!”
(John 20:28).

“Peter and the apostles affirmed their belief in Christ at great risk to themselves and their families. The Spirit is at work, giving ordinary, doubting people extraordinary boldness to declare the core beliefs of Christian faith. God works in surprising ways, through unexpected people, to share the good news of Easter. With the Spirit’s help, we can give witness too.”⁴

In a sense, Thomas and his doubts speak to all humanity and their doubts.⁵ You can go home and stand in front of a mirror and discover a picture of Thomas. In many ways everyday we are like Thomas. We doubt.

But then, when we doubt, we are invited to remember that Jesus is the one who comes to all humanity, even in the midst of our questions and doubts, bringing his grace and peace.

It has been said in many ways that if we move from head to heart, belief takes on a different character. Perhaps our real struggle is to believe, to trust, that after a great suffering or heartache, we can go on with life.

Imagine for a moment the context in the life of the disciples. The community was grieving the death of Jesus. They only had some narratives coming from the women. Men did not believe in the testimony of the women in matters of faith on those days. On the other hand, I am not sure if wives believed in the testimony of their husbands either!

4 <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>

5 Idem.

Like Thomas and the disciples, people can be skeptical about the resurrection but they do not react the same way, when they turn their eyes to see the reality of the world where we live and the need of new life and renewal that we desperately need to transform our wounds and sorrows into something different and hopeful.

When we address doubt as a spiritual reality rather than an intellectual struggle, locked doors begin to open. Naming the wounds in our context, both individually and collectively, prepares us to experience the resurrection as a living reality, not simply an event from two thousand years ago.⁶

People may wonder what the resurrection means for us now. We know the classic answer: it is the promise of eternal life. Death does not have the last word. But how is that hope translated into the daily rhythms of our lives?

We need to refresh our daily experience remembering that Easter touches our daily lives directly. In the same way that the disciples imposed themselves a wall and literally locked the door of the house where they were gathered because they were afraid, we can also lock our spiritual door and life because we can be afraid of talking openly about our faith in a world that is gradually moving into a deeper secularization.

But the gospel today shows us that locked doors are not an obstacle to the risen Christ. You can read in the Gospel text today that “The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, (and suddenly) Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”⁷

6 Preaching 2016.

7 John 20, 19

I think this is the incredible power of the resurrection, the power to touch us when we are imprisoned in our own fear, when we are living inside a reduced space with locked doors when we are afraid of the world and the people surrounding us.

In the moment of major anxiety and fear, when the disciples felt lost and without direction, suddenly Jesus appears and says: Peace be with you. “Shalom”, the peace of God, the peace that cannot be reached in this world, that heavenly peace is the one that the resurrected Lord is bringing to his community.

Like the disciples, we are also living in a time full of uncertainty, anxiety, doubt and fear.

Around us people are living like the disciples incarcerated in their fears or doubting like Thomas that there is a new way called resurrection.

Fear, anxiety and insecurity make us lock our doors. Not only physical doors but also spiritual doors. We are living in an era of closed minds and hardened hearts and souls to the possibility to experience the newness that God wants to bring to our life.

The world is too busy focused on the flaws and the difficulties of the system, that we as a society and culture have forgotten that the risen Christ can break all barriers and come to us suddenly, showing us that God can be with us in any time and space. God has the power to deliver us from our self-lockdown.

Thomas thought he needed to reach out and touch Jesus' wounds before he could believe in the resurrection. Confronted with the risen Christ, Thomas realized that that was enough.

The question then is what do people in these days think they need in order to believe? How does Jesus enter the locked rooms of our hearts these days?

The answer is simple and precisely for that reason it is hard to understand and accept easily. Jesus enters the locked rooms of our hearts today through song, through Eucharist, through baptism, through scripture, through prayer.

Think for a moment today and try to remember:

When has Jesus been most real to you?

When have you seen lives touched by the risen Christ?

Could it be the celebration of a newborn infant? Loving care of the dying? The gift of healing? Christ is risen and entering our lives daily. Show Jesus to your people.⁸

A risen Christ that can enter when the doors are locked and invites is to see, to touch and to seat with him at the table to share the meal of eternal life.

This is the message of Christ for Thomas and the whole community of disciples. Faith and doubt are part of the same coin. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, doubt is the opportunity that God gives us to experience the unexpected visit of the risen Lord when we are locked into the prison of our fears and anxieties. Doubt is the way that God uses to call our attention to the miracle of the resurrection.

Doubt is the challenge that God sends us to invite us to walk beyond the walls of our limited reason and logic.

Doubt is the blessing that we receive every time that we can see that after the doubting moment, after the crisis of faith, we can have more love for the Lord

⁸ Theological Reflection. <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>

and more security and more love for the world that God has created and redeemed.

Doubt is an opportunity, a challenge, a blessing, an open door that can help us to grow in our faith. Doubt is the invitation to believe again, to see, to touch and to taste the living bread of heaven every day, every time, every season.

Thanks be to God, who through our doubts, makes us grow more and more in our faith.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.