

# Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2020

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Pasadena, California

## Gospel: John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup>When 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." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So 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."

<sup>26</sup>A 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." <sup>27</sup>Then 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." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>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."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But 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.

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I often feel bad for Thomas. The Church has had a history of picking on him because it seems like he refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. But the truth of the matter is that Thomas was only asking for the same experience that the rest of the disciple received.

Imagine that Mary Magdalene just came and told you that Jesus has been raised from the dead and that she has seen him in person. I'm sure many of the disciples felt confusion, awe, wonderment, and excitement all at the same time. It was probably very overwhelming to hear that Jesus was again living! It certainly caused Peter and the beloved disciple to run off to the tomb in order to check things out.

For Thomas, I am wondering if he needed some air. I'm wondering if he needed to spend some time in solitude in order to wrap his mind around the resurrection. Or, perhaps Thomas was one who was not afraid of Jesus' opponents and went out to see if he could find Jesus. Whatever the reason, he did miss Jesus' first



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appearance to the disciples, and when they told him, he probably felt angry at himself, but also hurt that Jesus would choose to appear when he wasn't there. Perhaps it was more out of being hurt and being angry that Thomas said he wouldn't believe unless he got to feel Jesus' wounds.

But I'm also sure there are many of us who have probably felt the same way as Thomas. Perhaps there have been times where we've wished to see and feel Jesus only to be disappointed. I know I have had times where I thought my job as a pastor would be a lot easier if Jesus were to just show up sometimes. Perhaps we've all had those moments when we thought it would be easier to believe if Jesus would just give us some sort of sign/miracle that would affirm our faith.

I wonder how many of us wish Jesus would show up right now? We too find ourselves locked away from COVID-19; many of us afraid for our lives, our families and friends, our economy, and fearful of how much longer our isolation will have to last. I grew angry and afraid this past week of all the protests happening in states like Minnesota and Michigan. I am afraid that these mass gatherings will cause a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases and our stay at home order will end up lasting all summer! If only Jesus could show up!

But while Jesus did end up showing himself to the all the disciples, including Thomas, we know that we aren't afforded that privilege. But, then again, today's gospel isn't about those whom Jesus revealed himself to. It is about seeing through believing. The whole understanding behind this post-resurrection story can be found in Jesus' words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Throughout the entire gospel of John, the author is trying to get the reader to answer this question – will you believe in Jesus and enter into abiding relationship with him? All of the signs that Jesus does in the book of John, all of his discourse leading up to his arrest, and the very act of death and resurrection are all put before us to help us answer this question. This story about the disciples getting to see and touch Jesus is to help emphasize the counterpoint that you don't have to physically see and touch Jesus in order to believe in him. This goes back to the passion story when Jesus tells the Sanhedrin that they should ask Jesus' followers, for they know what is the truth, for they listen to what he has told them. He is in abiding relationship with them. This is the power of God's word. We don't need to see and touch the human Jesus because the power of God's truth, spoken through Jesus, has freed us to believe.

We are fortunate because we are sustained by the power of the good news of Jesus' resurrection. We have been told the story of God's love poured out through Jesus on the cross, and in that story the Holy Spirit has been breathed upon us, giving us the freedom to believe in the promise of resurrection. Each week, during our Sunday worship we again connect to this amazing story through our liturgy, our song, our scripture readings, and the sacraments. All of them are means by which the power of God's word strengthen our faith and free us to continue believing without seeing the human Christ.

But, while we may not ever see the human Christ, the power of God's word frees us to see Jesus in other ways. We see Jesus in water at the font when we remember the gift of baptism and that it ties us into Christ's



death and resurrection. We see Jesus in the bread of life and cup of salvation as fully present in the elements that we consume for the forgiveness of sins and to connect our very beings with Jesus. We also see Jesus in the ways we care for each other and support one another. We see Jesus in the essential personnel like the nurse and the grocery store clerk who risk their health every day in order to help support and heal others. We see Jesus in the friend who reaches out to us when we are feeling emotionally overwhelmed. We see Jesus in the strangers who leave positive messages on our sidewalks. We see Jesus in the teacher that continues to adapt to teaching their students remotely. We see Jesus through the neighbor who keeps their distance so that we all stay safe. We see Jesus in the parents that are willing to assist their children get through this challenging time.

Of course, this doesn't even cover all those times we may see Jesus in art; or out in the beauty of nature; or in the inspiring message of a movie. And, let's not forget the ways Jesus shows up in music!

The truth of the matter is that we don't need to receive what the disciples got. We don't need Jesus to physically show up, for the power of the story; the power of God's word will free us to believe and continue to believe. And, in doing so, we will come to see all the ways the risen Christ becomes present among us.

**Amen.**



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