

The Second Sunday of Easter + April 19, 2020

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Thomas missed church that day. He wasn't there. It was a pity that he missed out on what his fellow disciples got to experience firsthand. It was the first Easter liturgy and Thomas wasn't there.

The Risen Jesus appeared without advanced notice to the other disciples, huddled together in fear behind locked doors. He stood in their midst and greeted them with the words of Peace, showing them his hands and side, those places on his body that bore the scars, the wounds of his crucifixion. When they saw this, the disciples rejoiced. Upon seeing their crucified and risen Lord, they believed. Their faith had been restored, or maybe, more accurately, their faith had been made new. For Jesus also breathed on them. He breathed the Holy Spirit on them and sent them into the world as messengers, bearers, instruments of God's forgiveness. And Thomas wasn't there.

When Thomas heard from the others about what happened, he was a little out of sorts. It's one thing to get a report on what took place but it is quite another to be there in person. I think Thomas felt grief at not being able to be there with the rest of his friends at that first Easter liturgy. I understand his request: "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."

I get it. I resonate with Thomas. I don't want to malign him or even suggest that Thomas' doubt is the primary focus of this passage. I think Thomas expressed a desire that is in every believer's heart and mind.

With Thomas, we long to touch and see and behold the Risen Jesus and we get to this on a regular basis. Every Sunday in the celebration of Holy Communion, the Risen Christ stands in our midst and ministers to us through his life-giving wounds. We haven't been able to experience Sunday worship in weeks and, sadly, this pandemic came to us during the holiest days of the Christian year. We long for the time when we can worship again together as siblings in Christ. We want to see and touch the wounded Risen Christ *because we need to.*

We need to commune with the Risen Christ and one another *so that we may believe.*

Christian practice is embodied. Sunday worship is embodied. Jesus touches us physically, ministering to all our sense.

We long to return to our common worship - to sing and pray and listen and eat and drink. We are hungry for Eucharist, for community, for common prayer. We long for Sunday morning because we know *that's where Jesus shows up.*

No, God is not limited to the experience of worship and, yes, as the priest poet Gerard Manley Hopkins once wrote: "Christ plays in Ten thousand places." Christ plays in every aspect of our lives. Still, we come to worship because we know that's where Jesus reliably shows up in his body (you and me) and around his gifts of water, word, bread and wine. We can count on Jesus being there. With Thomas, we want to go back to that Easter liturgy. Thomas did and when he went back a week later, the next Sunday, the Risen Jesus showed up again greeting the apostles

with peace and revealing his nail scarred hand and side. Thomas saw and touched and believed.

We long to gather again on Sunday morning for we know above all else that that is where Jesus shows up. We long to meet the Risen Christ on Sunday morning because we need to. I know I need to so that I may behold the Christ who plays in 10,000 places.

- Are you feeling fear in these days of quarantine and staying place? So did those first disciples who were huddled behind locked doors. We need Jesus' greeting of peace to quell our fear and fill us with life and greet one another with the life-affirming words: "Peace be with you!"
- Are you feeling the limitations of social distancing and isolation? Connecting through Zoom and Skype is great but it doesn't replace gathering around holy things or rubbing shoulders around the communion table. Singing alone is fine but nothing beats joining your voice with a hundred or more other voices.
- Are you ready for a vision check? As soon as the water is poured into the font, as it is every Sunday, we know that Christ is drawing us into the vision of God's Kingdom and when we hear the scriptures and proclamation we hear a much needed word from God – a word that stirs us from complacency and into deeper trust and word that covers us with mercy and grace.
- Are you longing for God's healing touch? We can count on Jesus to provide that in great abundance through the healing prayers, the announcement of forgiveness, and the sharing of bread and cup.
- Are you needing a corrective or an antidote, to making God in your own image? We long to be fed from the life-giving wounds of Christ - the body of Christ given for you, the blood of Christ shed for you – so that we may see God in real life, especially in the wounded, broken places of life.
- Are you in need of some fresh air? Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on us and send us into the world as messenger, bearers, ambassadors of forgiveness. The Sunday gathering is a sending into the world to go in peace to serve with nothing less than the power of the Risen Christ in us.

I adhere to the ancient maxim, *lex ordandi, lex credendi*. It means the law of prayer shapes the law of belief. In other words, common worship and prayer, shapes the way we believe and by "believe" we mean trust or, more to the point: worship shapes the way we live.

When this pandemic began in Lent, I suggested we frame our time away from church as a kind of fasting. Now we are in Easter and Easter is no fast. Easter is a feast. It's a fifty-day feast. So, in that spirit, I suggest we practice these days away from church as a time of waiting through a spirit of anticipatory joy, to look forward to the time we worship together again and to get excited about it.

Waiting with a sense of anticipatory joy ... that's what I advise adults preparing for baptism, to wait to receive communion until their baptismal day and if they've already been communing, to step back and refrain from the meal to help them prepare with a sense of expectation.

The Sunday Holy Communion is, in itself, a kind of waiting – a looking forward to the eternal heavenly banquet. We call it a “foretaste of the feast to come.”

Just so, in this time when we cannot be together, let’s practice anticipatory joy by dwelling deeper into the connection points between Sunday morning and daily life.

Here are a few suggestions ...

Set a festive dinner table. Decorate your house with Easter decorations. Read scripture. Sing songs. Light a candle every day and fill a bowl of water each day to remember your baptism. Make the sign of the cross to remember whose you are. Pray at different times during the day. Make breakfast, lunch, and dinner times to bless God shaping the meal around a prayer of blessing. Greet one another by saying: “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” At the end of the day, review your day, and ask “What am I most grateful for and what am I least grateful for?” Join one of the several virtual small groups at Phinney during this time. Pray for the needs of your neighbor and the world. Pray the Psalms. Enjoy the beauty on days of sunshine as much as you can in these challenging times. Send a note or an email or a card to other parishioners or family members or a friend you haven’t heard from in a long time.

Practice Resurrection.

And trust Jesus’ words that “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Or, we could say it like this: blessed are those haven’t seen for a while and still believe.

We are so blessed because Jesus has breathed the Spirit on us and we are filled with the unique power of God. God is with us even as we wait. So, please know that neither life nor death nor angels or principalities or pandemics or viruses, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Let that be in your head and heart as we wait for that day when we gather again to touch, hear, taste and see and with Thomas exclaim “My Lord, and My God!” Amen.