

Apostles Anglican Church

The Second Sunday of Easter

7 April 2024

Fr. Rob Goebel

Main Text: John 20:19-31

Supporting Text: 1 John 5:1-5

Title: The Victory That Overcomes the World

Collect of the Day:

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: **Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith**; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, you gave your Apostles grace truly to believe and to preach your word: Grant that we might love what they believed and preach what they taught through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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Introduction

What a wonderful Holy Week and Easter day we've had! We journeyed with Jesus as he washed his disciples' feet, gave us a new commandment to love one another, and instituted the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday. We wept on Good Friday as God's Son was nailed to the cross. We lit a new fire on Saturday night and rejoiced at the great acclamation, "The Lord is risen!" The children celebrated with an Easter Egg hunt, and we rang out our joy with bells and noisemakers of all kinds on Easter Day.

But all that is over now, and although it's still Easter, most of the festivities are done. The excitement is gone. There are no more Easter Egg Hunts. Most of the kids are back in school. Leftovers from the Easter feast are either gone or in the

freezer (hopefully). Today is the Second Sunday of Easter; nothing much out of the ordinary happens today. All the best words have been spoken . . . and we get it “Christ is risen.”

Where we find ourselves today is much like where the Disciples found themselves in today’s reading from St. John’s Gospel.

Transition

Jesus has been nailed to a cross; he’s died and been buried for three day! Not only has he risen from the dead, but he has appeared to many, including most of the disciples. At this point, the excitement is pretty much over.

But somehow in all of this, Jesus’ disciple Thomas has been overlooked. This can’t be an accident. Jesus being fully God, is all-knowing; he could have made sure Thomas was gathered with the other disciples when he appeared the first time. So why does our Lord wait to appear to Thomas?

Jesus waits because he has one last very important thing to do before he goes to the Father. He has one more person he must encourage to keep the faith. That person . . . is YOU! It’s you and me. It’s all of us who would come to believe that Jesus is the savior of the world without seeing the wounds in his hands, feet, and sides.

You will commonly hear St. Thomas called “Doubting Thomas.” That’s a poor assessment of this man who was willing to go to Bethlehem and die with Jesus just a few pages ago.¹ It seems Thomas was simply saying this is where my faith is right now; he was being honest. Frankly, Thomas is presented here for our sake. Thomas is for us. Christ takes this opportunity to speak directly to us and say, “You that come long after all the eye witnesses are dead; you that read the accounts of the Gospel thousands of years later and believe; you are blessed. Your faith is a blessing to the world.”

Transition

¹ John 11:16

Thank God he saw fit to “forget” Thomas the first time he appeared to the disciples. I can imagine Thomas had a lot going on in his head. A lot had taken place between Jesus’ arrest and when Christ appeared to the disciples. We’re in the same place Thomas was in.

1 – It’s not too late to believe.

Many great and some not-so-great things have happened since that first easter morning.

Since then, the world has seen:

1. The Renaissance
2. The Reformation
3. The enlightenment and
4. The Industrial Revolution
5. We harnessed the power of electricity
6. We figured out how to make good use of the wind, and we made ourselves fly
7. There have been too many conquests, revolutions, wars, and other tragedies to enumerate here
8. We’ve experienced pandemics, and we’ve developed vaccines
9. We’ve exploited the power of the atom for good and ill
10. And we’ve even sent people to walk on the moon

There’s a lot of history between us and Jesus. But Christ shows us through Thomas that it’s not too late to believe and trust in Jesus, the living savior of the world.

You and I could write out a long list of things we’ve seen and experienced in our lifetimes so far. There would be some joys, some great happiness for sure, but there would undoubtedly be pains, sorrows, and tragedies. So many times, the pain of these wounds strangle out the memories of the joys we’ve experienced. If we’re not careful, we can become jaded, hardened, and angry. But no matter what we’ve been through; no matter the disappointments; no matter the thoughts of doubts, and the number of times we’ve wanted to call it quits, it’s not too late to embrace the risen Christ.

This isn't the only place in scripture where Jesus reassures us we can always return to him. In Matthew chapter 20, Jesus tells the parable of Laborers in the Vineyard. Here Jesus says the owner of a vineyard went out early in the morning, gathering people to work in his fields. The owner agreed to pay them a day's wage. Then the man went out again at midday and the late afternoon. He even went out an hour before the end of the work day and called people to come work in his vineyard. At the end of the day, he paid all the workers the same amount of money.² Now, I'm not going to get into this parable except to say that Jesus is making it clear here that He calls us to embrace him no matter how late the hour.

In this place, between the resurrection and the return of Christ it can be difficult to wait in hope. In this inbetween place, we suffer many things, but Christ presents Thomas to remind us it's not too late to embrace him and believe.

Transition

St. James assures us that if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us.³ But Thomas' encounter with the risen Christ also reveals something all of us who believe without seeing need to hear.

2 – Faith is not without doubt (Jesus comes to us in our doubt).

Faith does not require an absence of doubt. In fact, doubt is woven into the very fabric of faith. Doubt drives us to consider the validity of our faith, it calls us to consider our faith in a deeper way and to ask questions we would otherwise not ask. It's all right to come with honest questions.⁴ God knows our hearts anyway, so why not let him into our doubts?

Some of the biggest names in the story of Redemption had doubts

1. Abraham, for instance. Maybe when you think of Abraham, you automatically think of his great faith in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. But we can't forget Abraham's doubt when he took Hager to be his wife,

² Matthew 20:1-16

³ James 4:8

⁴ J. Michael Shannon, Sermon Outlines for Seekers, ed. Sam E. Stone, Standard Sermon Starters (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1996), 43.

and she gave birth to Ishmael. Abraham doubted God's promise, but that didn't stop God from using him to bless all the peoples of the world.

2. Then there's Moses, who argued with God and made all kinds of excuses when God called him to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. After all his excuses were exhausted, He says: "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."⁵ And Moses' doubt didn't end there; he continued to doubt God throughout the wandering in the wilderness.⁶
3. We could look at many other examples, but I want to consider just one more. The Great John the Baptist. John is the man who said, "Behold the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world." John is the man who said, "I am not worthy to untie his sandals." John is the man who said, "He must become more and more and I must become less and less." However, John is also the one who said, "Are you the one [the messiah, or should we look for another.]"⁷ But Jesus is not afraid of John's doubt. No, instead, Jesus described John as the greatest man ever born of a woman.⁸

Jesus isn't afraid of questions and doubts. He wants us to ask him the hard questions. He wants us to examine our beliefs. Because an unexamined and unquestioned faith is a weak faith. Others are going to question our faith. We must embrace our doubts and strengthen our faith so when we are asked to give a reason for it, we are ready to proclaim it with power.

Transition

Faith like this can change the world. It's a faith that astonishes those who do not believe. They can't understand how we can believe something as preposterous as the resurrection without witnessing it for ourselves. The world cannot comprehend a faith held so ardently that a person would die for it, as St. Thomas did in India. And it seems unfathomable to them to hold faith and doubt in tension. But holding this faith is not enough.

3 – Professing and Practicing Our Faith

⁵ Exodus 3 and 4

⁶ Numbers 11:21-23 and 20:10-13

⁷ Shannon

⁸ Shannon

Let's take a look at the collect for the day on page 4 [first service]; page 5 [second service] of your bulletin.

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: **Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith**; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

The faith that we profess is Christ has died, he is risen, and he is coming again. Believing this flies in the face of the world's understanding, but it changes everything: you, me, others, the world itself, when we live that faith not only with our lips but also with our lives. When our faith informs our politics; when it moves us to action for the addict, the poor, the unwed mother, and all those on the margins of our world; when our faith changes how we act towards those we vehemently disagree with, it moves people to faith in Jesus Christ.

Listen again to our reading from 1 John chapter 5 [if you want to read along, it's on page 1023 of your pew Bible. Starting with verse 4:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. **And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.** 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Our faith overcomes the world. Are we capable of holding a faith without sight? Are we able to hold our faith and our doubts in tension? Can we keep our actions in line with our profession?

Well, no. We can't, but the Spirit of the resurrected Christ living in us can. We are not the perfectors of our faith; he is! And He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

Amen.