

Apostles Anglican Church

The Second Sunday of Easter

April 27, 2025

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Title: **Do Not Disbelieve, But Believe: The Power of the Risen Christ**

Text: John 21:19-31

Last week we observed the death and resurrection of Jesus. Last Sunday we read in the gospel of the women discovering his empty tomb and them running to tell the disciples who met the news with disbelief, until they too, ran to the tomb to find the grave clothes folded and the tomb empty.

For us, this glorious news was met with Alleluias, bell ringing, and celebration. Last week we left church boldly, with renewed joy and passion to share this good news with the world. We spent the day celebrating our risen Savior's victory over death with feasting and egg hunts and all sorts of sweet treats.

Having lived our lives with Easter being the greatest celebration of the year, it's surprising, as we read in our passage today, that when we drop in on the disciples Easter evening, we don't find them recovering from too much coconut bunny cake, but instead with locked doors, fearfully hiding from the Jews.

John's narrative doesn't tell us how Jesus entered the locked room, but we read that he appears to them, standing in their midst, proclaiming peace and showing them his wounds. He breathes on them, imparting the Holy Spirit and telling them that whoever they forgive will be forgiven and whoever they withhold forgiveness from will not be forgiven. The Father's plan for all time, that God's grace would flow through Israel to the entire world, had been fulfilled by Jesus and now he's putting that plan into action, sending out his most faithful followers. His faithful followers, who had fallen asleep when he asked them to watch with him, many dispersed during his crucifixion, and currently they are in lockdown mode. Not exactly the

image one might expect from the group who would change the world for Christ!

We might expect that after that after Jesus was in their midst, they would move about in the power of the Holy Spirit unafraid. And yet, we only know they tell Thomas, who had missed the gathering, they have seen him. John tells us that Thomas says he will only believe when he sees it for himself. Fear has a way of blinding us to the truth, doesn't it?

Eight days later, they are gathered again, still in a locked room, this time with Thomas in their midst this time, when Jesus appears again standing alongside them. He again says, "Peace be with you," and then directing his attention to Thomas, he shows him his hands and side and tells Thomas, "do not disbelieve, but believe."

Although Jesus had told them throughout his ministry that he would die and rise again and had helped equip them in their new vocations as fishers of men, we see them here behind locked doors. I imagine fearful and unsure what they are to do now. Their leader had been targeted and killed by powerful political and religious leaders. The disciples knew he was risen, but the tale the officials were dispersing was that the disciples had stolen his body. It was definitely a bad look for those leaders to lose the body of the one they had plotted to get out of the spotlight. Things did not go to plan for these religious leaders and they were looking for someone to blame.

It was not only imagined fears that the disciples were dealing with, they faced the real possibility that they could be held accountable for the disappearance of Jesus body. **They** may know he was risen, but to the rest of the world that was unknown and it would be easy for the officials to fan the flame of the lie that the disciples of Jesus were grave robbers.

Even though:

the grave had been guarded by armed guards,

the stone over the tomb was heavy and could not have been easily moved without notice of the guards,

the facts didn't matter, the religious leaders could still fabricate a story that implicated the disciples in some grand heist, in order to cover their lack of control in Jesus's disappearance.

We can only imagine the thoughts that clouded the minds of the disciples, the gripping fear and anxiety they felt as they sensed a coming storm. I'm thankful that the scripture includes this time of fear and doubt. Haven't we all experienced times that our fears have held us captive? A certain diagnosis, a loss of relationship, our compulsions or addictions, hurts we experience or cause, uncertainties in the world, wars or rumors of wars, the list of anxieties is seems endless, but because fear is part of our humanity, we are able to see ourselves in this story, just like the disciples we understand what it feels like to hide from things that frighten us.

This story allows us to get the first glimpse of the power of resurrection. God's good news is demonstrated here in their story, He moved through locked doors to set them free.

Jesus didn't wait for the disciples to figure out that they didn't need to be afraid. He didn't wait for Thomas to get over his doubt. He didn't wait for them to be anything other than what they were - for him to enter, stand alongside them in the midst of their stuff, and love them.

(Slowly)**We** know that too. Don't we? **He moves through our locked doors, where we are held prisoners, into the very midst of our stuff and loves us.** As we recalled last week in our baptismal vows, we turn our back on the devil and all his evil ways, and follow after the one who loves us, into the waters of baptism. Through our baptism he gives us, as he did the disciples, the Holy Spirit to empower us, give us grace, and to guide us.

It's profound to realize that even after the disciples received the Holy Spirit, it took some time for them to walk out the mission that he had

given them to do. They didn't instantaneously transform into the people that Jesus knew they would become, it took some time for them to grasp that as they tried to follow what Jesus had instructed them to do, that something had changed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they had the ability and understanding to carry out their calling, which they would continue to grow in awareness. But they couldn't begin that journey, until they left the locked room.

And we know they left the locked room, as Luke shares with us in Acts, let us read it again:

¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people ^hby the hands of the apostles. And they were all ⁱtogether in ^jSolomon's Portico.

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of ^qthe Sadducees), and filled with ^rjealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and ^sput them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night ^tan angel of the Lord ^uopened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all ^vthe words of ^wthis ^xLife." ²¹ And when they heard this, ^ythey entered the temple ^zat daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." ²⁴ Now when ^athe captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison ^bare standing in the temple and teaching the people." ²⁶ Then ^cthe captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for ^dthey were afraid of being stoned by the people.

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, ^e“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you ^fintend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, ^g“We must obey God rather than men.”

Those who had huddled afraid in a locked room, were now moving in the midst of the people, bringing God’s healing and restoration. Their hearts had changed and rather than fear the leaders, they spoke truth: they would obey God.

This week in our Wednesday healing service we observed St George, who stood by his faith in Christ and was martyred rather than being swayed by Diocletian to save his life and make a sacrifice to pagan Gods. Father John reminded us that the only free people are those who no longer fear death. Hebrews 2 expounds upon that thought:

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise ^hpartook of the same things, that ⁱthrough death he might ^jdestroy ^kthe one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who ^lthrough fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Throughout Acts we see the Apostles doing mighty works of God as they learned to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and experience personally the great love of a Savior. Our story today given to us by St John of them frightened, behind locked doors allows us to see them at the beginning of their transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit. In that transformation, death lost it’s grip on them; they moved across the world pouring out God’s love for humanity, releasing captives and changing the world forever with the message of God’s good news.

Glory be to our God - who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.