

Sunday, April 12, 2026
Second Sunday of Easter (Year A)
John 20.19-31
The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

“Lingering with the Resurrection”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Well, we survived! We made it through the rigors of Holy Week and Easter Sunday. We witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion on Good Friday and we joyously proclaimed his resurrection on Easter Day. Having made it through Easter Day, having witnessed the Resurrection, what more is there to do? It can be tempting to rush on ahead, to move on to the next thing—as if Easter is just one more thing to check off the list. But not so fast! We can’t just blow by Easter as if it were a “one and done” event.

After all, we are very intentional in our run-up to, in our preparation for, Easter. We have the forty-day season of Lent where we focus on preparing ourselves in body, mind, and spirit for Easter. Seeking to strip away whatever it is that might get in the way of our relationship with God. Hoping that our Lenten disciplines might yield permanent changes in our lives of faith. Changes that will open us up more fully to witnessing the drama of Jesus’ Passion. That will prepare us to be able to experience more fully the meaning of his resurrection.

Just as we need time to prepare for Easter, we then need time to linger with the events of Easter Day. To seek to absorb and comprehend what it all means. To try to experience the mystery that is the resurrection—an event that has never happened before and for which there is no frame of reference. To try to understand what this mysterious and inexplicable event means for us and for our lives of faith. That is not something that happens in the matter of a few minutes or even a few hours on Easter Day. That is something that takes time. Lots of it. Perhaps, even more time than it took to prepare ourselves to get to Easter in the first place.

This is why Easter is not just one day but an entire season. Forty days from Easter to the Ascension and another ten days to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world. Fifty days of absorbing what the resurrection means. At least, trying to. And that’s how long it took for the original disciples—for those who knew Jesus firsthand—to even begin to process what had happened, what it meant for them, and more importantly, what it meant for the world. And even then, there would still be work—there still is work—to be done in fully absorbing, comprehending, and living into what it means to be followers of the Resurrected One.

The enormity of this task of absorbing and processing what happened on that first Easter morning is indicated by the fact that the Church spends multiple Sundays just focused on what happened that day. Easter Sunday, with the resurrection itself; and then today, the Sunday after Easter Day, focused on what happened later in the day. And, next Sunday, we get another story of what happened on that first Easter Day, as well. All focusing on the amazing and yet, oh so perplexing, event that is the resurrection.

Our Gospel for today continues with the resurrection story we heard Easter Day, where Mary Magdalene had her encounter with the Risen Christ. Ending with her going to the disciples and announcing, "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20.18). That evening, ten of the original twelve disciples have locked themselves away for fear of the religious authorities. Judas, of course, had committed suicide and Thomas is inexplicably absent. Jesus appears to the ten gathered disciples. The implication is that they did not initially recognize him, despite Mary Magdalene's proclamation earlier in the day. Perhaps they did not believe her. Perhaps, in their grief, they were not able to recognize him. Highly likely since no one would expect to see someone they had witnessed dying three days before. Perhaps there was some other reason. When it comes to the early disciples recognizing the Risen Christ, virtually every Gospel account of the Risen Lord suggests that resurrection means something more mysterious than mere resuscitation. Jesus has risen, but he is somehow different. That being the case, only when he showed them his hands and his side, revealing the wounds of his crucifixion, were they able to recognize him as their Lord. Even in resurrected form, bearing the wounds of his earthly life, of his physical death. Echoes of the wounds the disciples carried within their hearts and spirits at the loss of one so dear to them.

When Thomas does return to the other disciples, they inform him, "We have seen the Lord." A parallel statement to the one made by Mary Magdalene earlier in the day. A statement they themselves did not seem to accept. Just as Thomas now is unable to accept. Why would he? Someone returning from the dead was preposterous. Even though Jesus had foretold that he would be raised. But here again, grief clouds the mind. "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." Not that he is unwilling to believe them. He just needs more to go on before accepting such an improbable thing. Just as his fellow disciples needed to see the wounds in Jesus' hands and side before they were able to recognize who he was. Thomas was asking for nothing more, nothing different than what the other disciples had experienced. The implication being that, at least as Thomas sees it, something this significant, something as unbelievable as someone being raised from the dead and appearing in your living room, is too important to leave to mere words; direct experience is needed. Perhaps the difference with Thomas was that he was at least honest, more forthright, about his questions, about his unbelief. Indicating that he was at least open to the possibility of believing. A crucial difference from actually doubting, which implies an inability or an unwillingness to accept what is presented.

A week later, nothing seems to have changed. The disciples are still locked away. They do not appear to have done anything with the knowledge, the proof, that Jesus has been resurrected. Thomas' own unbelief notwithstanding. At which point Jesus makes a second appearance to the gathered disciples. This time, addressing Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." The latter statement which should actually and more rightly be translated as "Do not have unbelief but believe." Subtle, yet significant, difference. Again, Thomas did not doubt, but was cautiously skeptical. Jesus' mere invitation is all it takes. Jesus meets Thomas' previously expressed demands point by point to help him move to faith. Or to deeper faith. Although Thomas does not accept Jesus' offer to touch the wounds. He doesn't have to. The invitation is enough. Jesus offering himself is enough. Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God!" His proclamation of his absolute faith in his Risen Lord.

Jesus responds to Thomas' proclamation of faith by saying, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Certainly, in the two thousand years since, countless individuals—ourselves included—have come to believe despite not having seen the Risen Christ or his wounds, as did Thomas, as did the other ten disciples. There is almost a note of criticism—be it intended by Jesus or merely perceived on our part—that Thomas and the other disciples needed more proof, needed to see Christ's wounds with their own eyes. We should not be too hard on them, or think too highly of ourselves that "we didn't need proof and yet, we believe."

If anybody needed actual proof, it was the disciples and those closest to Jesus. They had been through a traumatic experience, witnessing the death of their friend and teacher. Yes, Jesus had told them he would be raised from the dead. Yes, they wanted to believe that would happen. But they were too close to it. They probably could not bring themselves to believe it was true—at least, not without some sort of proof—lest their hopes and dreams be further dashed, breaking their hearts even more, bringing even more pain and loss. They so wanted to believe that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead. They sooooo wanted it to be true. But at the same time, they needed to protect their fragile hearts, their fragile spirits.

And Jesus gave them the time and the space, he gave them the experiences they needed, to help move them along to where they needed to be as those he had chosen to be witnesses to the resurrection; as those he had chosen to proclaim the resurrection.

The scene the week after Easter with the Risen Lord coming to Thomas seems to be a turning point for the disciples. It was the point in which the grieving and fearful disciples, whose world had been turned upside down with the death of Jesus, whose world had been turned upside down with the resurrection of Jesus, were themselves resurrected. In this moment, they are able to fully recognize the truth of the resurrection and what it meant for them. They are able to move from a place of inward-focused grief, a place of inward-focused fear, a place of inward-focused confusion, a place of inward-focused yet protective disbelief, to a place of outward-focused acceptance, a place of outward-focused liberation. Leading ultimately to a place of outward-focused witness. Echoing the words of their sister Mary Magdalene: "I have seen the Lord!" Echoing the words of their brother Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Only made possible because they were given the time they needed to move forward in faith.

Yes, Jesus was right. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Blessed are WE who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Although, it is not always as easy as these words might imply. Just like those early disciples, when it comes to accepting the reality of the resurrection, and the power of the Resurrected Christ, we sometimes have to work to move from a place of unbelief to a place of belief. Unlike them, we do not generally have the Risen Christ coming to us, saying "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." We have to rely on the testimony and witness, to rely on the example of those who have gone before us in faith. But like the early disciples, we often do have to work through our own uncertainties, our own confusions, our own doubts. All of which are natural and understandable when dealing with something as mysterious as the resurrection. But we can be assured that the Risen One is, like he was with the disciples, patient with us, allowing us to work through our questions, uncertainties, and

even doubts in our own time. To have the time we need through the fifty days of Easter, to linger with the questions, the uncertainties, and the doubts. And we can be assured that the Risen One does provide us with the experiences we each need—in whatever form we need them—so that, in time, we are able to proclaim with Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!