

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 11, 2021 – EASTER 2B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*My Lord ... and My God!*”

Acts 4:32-35 (The Apostles witness to the Resurrection of Christ, and share all in common)
Psalm 133 (It is good and pleasant with the community dwells together in unity)
1 John 1:1—2:2 (God is Light; in Him there is no darkness; and He has made atonement for our sins)
St. John 20:19-31 (Thomas meets the Risen Lord, and believes!)

We’ve come to that time of year again. Resurrection Sunday is just past, and once more we’re hearing about Saint Thomas, who evidently can’t believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. Even so, we love this story that’s always told on the Second Sunday in Easter. I think it’s because we can relate to Thomas’ flawed humanity, to his desire for solid proof before he will believe. And like Thomas, we too, yearn to see and touch Jesus.

At first, this story seems simple and straightforward. Thomas was not present when the Risen Lord appeared to the Apostles, initially. And when he heard about that, the event was simply beyond his understanding. He reacted as many of us would in the 21st-Century, when confronted by such an awesome mystery—by trying to scrutinize and analyze it with scientific, objective, reason. Thomas declares “I won’t believe until I see it for myself.” So, in His next resurrected appearance, Jesus calls his bluff. We could say, “end of story,” but of course, it’s not.

There’s a whole lot more to this Scripture lesson than a simple tale of doubting and then believing. To begin with, it isn’t all that simple—partly because this story also says something about us. So, let’s take a look once more at what this Gospel passage is all about, starting with Jesus’ first resurrection appearance.

The Apostles are gathered in a room on the first day of the week, the same as they had done when Jesus was with them. Suddenly, Jesus *appears* among them! And He breathes on them, imparting to them the life of the Spirit. The Hebrew term for Holy Spirit is *ruach ha-kodesh*—meaning literally, “sacred breath”—the very same Spirit of God that we read about in Genesis, breathing all life and Creation into being. For whatever reason, Thomas isn’t there. Later, he hears secondhand about what happened, and he just can’t believe it.

The following week, all of the Apostles, including Thomas, are in the room when Jesus again appears among them. This time, Jesus offers Thomas the opportunity to touch His wounded hands and scarred side, but all of a sudden, Thomas doesn’t need to do that. He has changed from “I can’t believe it’s Jesus,” to “I can’t believe it’s not Jesus!” Then he offers Christ his most profound worship, and declaration of faith: “*My Lord and my God.*” These are words we should utter in our hearts whenever we enter this sanctuary and see Jesus watching over us from above our altar, or whenever we see the Blessed Sacrament lifted up during the Holy Eucharist: “*My Lord, and my God!*”

In the New Testament’s post-resurrection accounts, we see that whenever the risen Lord appears, it is to an assembled community. He doesn’t appear to Thomas alone. He also doesn’t appear to Thomas in the group in order to embarrass him. Christ is present among the assembly because it is within the community of faith that His followers continue learning about Him, supporting one another, and being effective witnesses with their lives, to the faith Jesus offers them.

In the final verses of today’s gospel, Christ tells the disciples that many will come after them who will not have the same experience of Him that they have had. Never again will anyone walk and talk with Jesus as these men and women had; nevertheless, countless others would also come to believe in Him. St. John the Evangelist writes at the end of this chapter that his gospel was written expressly “so that [others] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31 ESV).

So, in one sense, Jesus was offering Thomas a chance to experience seeing Him risen from the dead the same way the other disciples had. In doing that, Jesus also further strengthened the faith of that particular community gathered there.

In another sense, the Risen Lord is strengthening all of us, too, for we are a gathered community that meets on the first day of the week, and at other times, for the breaking of bread and prayers, in much the same way as the Apostles did.

They gathered to share their real-life experience of knowing Jesus and working with Him—and we can, too. The Apostles remembered Jesus saying, “Do this in remembrance of me.” We gather to continue sharing in their story that was handed down to us. But unlike the family stories we tell, this is not merely a remembrance, for we continue to participate in the living presence of Christ through the Eucharist, through sharing His sacred Body and His most precious Blood. How that happens is a mystery, but at the heart of that mystery is the powerful sense of Christ’s presence, and of belonging to Him, that draws us back here, week after week.

As Anglicans, we strongly believe that we are loved by the God who made us, and this Divine love is made clear in every transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary. Thomas was transformed from a questioning doubter to a faith-filled worshipper by His encounter with the presence of Jesus in that Upper Room. We, too, are given the opportunity to be transformed by His presence, when we encounter Christ at this very altar.

Thomas’ story also assures us that when, in our humanness, we give in to doubt, we are not cut off from the mercy of God. He gives us the same opportunity as Thomas to experience the reality of God’s love manifested in Christ Jesus, and in our community of faith.

Here, we are always accepted at God’s altar and in the company of our fellow believers, or our fellow doubters. After all, we’re in this together.

At each Holy Communion, Jesus offers us the opportunity to see and touch Him, just as He offered that to Thomas. Our Risen Lord offers us the opportunity to be changed into worshippers who cry out from our very souls, “*My Lord, and my God!*”

So, perhaps it’s time we stopped calling Thomas “doubting Thomas” and instead, be grateful to him for showing us that it’s okay to question, and that it’s normal to have doubts. Also, that it is perfectly fine to *believe* and *be transformed*.

How wonderful it is that Jesus Christ says to every one of us who came after St. Thomas: “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).* “Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.” Amen.

* Insp. Simon Rundell, 18 April 2009, [FrSimon.Wordpress.com](https://frsimon.wordpress.com) <<https://frsimon.wordpress.com/2009/04/18/sermon-easter-2-year-b/>> 11 April 2015.