

Second Sunday of Easter, April 27, 2025

St. Michael's Church

The Rev. Joshua Wong

Gospel: John 20:19-31

The following prayer is from Pope Francis' final Easter Prayer, let us pray:

"Sisters, brothers, in the wonder of the Easter faith, carrying in our hearts every expectation of peace and liberation, we can say: with You, O Lord, everything is new. With you, everything begins again." ***Amen.***

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Our Church will be remembering the next 50 days in which Jesus was on the earth before his ascension to heaven, leading us to the first Sunday in Pentecost on June 8th. During this Eastertide season, If I had one post-Easter prayer, a single prayer that expressed my many prayers, it would be to live as if this following truth were true: To believe that God's resurrection life will conquer all that threatens me and our world — like the violence of war; our tumultuous political leadership; a solution for homelessness; for the future of our ecological biosphere; for curing diseases; and for justice and peace in the world. I would like to believe in the Bible stories I tell the children on Wednesday, that if we

honor God, evil will not prevail, like David and Goliath, or Daniel and the Lion's Den.

I am often in the midst of conversations in which people express to me their fears about the future. Where is God when it looks like evil will triumph?

In moments like this, I often become silent, and cannot express my post-Easter prayer. To many people, believing that God's resurrection life will **conquer** all that threatens us, may sound too simplistic to solve the world's pressing problems.

But, last week on Easter Sunday, we Christians condensed our confession down to three words: "Christ is risen!" Aren't those three words suppose to be a game changer? Without the resurrection, Jesus is just another important teacher. But with it, the impossible was made possible. Miracles are real.

This Post-Easter, I would like to pray the Easter prayer of Pope Francis, that “In the wonder of the Easter faith, carrying in our hearts every expectation of peace and liberation.” I would pray to follow in Martha's faith, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." And to confess with Peter in the reading from Acts that "the God of our fathers raised up Jesus." And to hear Jesus's encouragement to Thomas: "Be not unbelieving but believing.”

But the Gospel reading this week is not about faith but about doubt — in particular, Thomas's refusal to believe the reports of the resurrection. Not all those who saw the risen Christ believed. And not all those who believed got to see him after his resurrection either. Thomas was an exception, said Jesus: "Because you have seen me you believe? Blessed are those who did not see and yet believed.” But it’s also important to remember that in the end, the famous doubter became a passionate witness. The Acts of Thomas from the early third century says that Thomas took the gospel to India by 52 AD. And even today, the St. Thomas Christians trace their origins to this disciple of doubt.

So, it seems that to get to faith, we need to process through doubt. Hence, in the next seven weeks of Eastertide, a recurring theme in the resurrection appearance stories is how, from the very outset, Christian communities struggled to perceive and believe. In reality, the majority of early Christians didn't notice Jesus' return, many were not visited by Jesus. And for many, they had a hard time understanding the concept of "resurrection," because it defies conventional understanding. But in any case, Jesus is back, but only a few have eyes to see that it is really him; even his closest followers need help which we will see in the weeks to come. So it seems that Thomas was not the only doubter. The followers of Christ had to develop their faith as well.

Here, a key tension in John's Gospel comes to a head: Jesus says to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" Although disbelief in the resurrection shapes part of our origin story, but gradually, a new chapter is now beginning in salvation history, a chapter in which the movement will grow and the church will be born, all on the basis of testimony! As I like to say, telling our stories of faith. Before Jesus ascends to heaven, he breathes the Holy Spirit upon his followers and commissions

them, sending them out to announce the good news, to persuade on the basis of testimony, of hearing-but-not-seeing. As a result, among a growing movement of people from all segments of society, doubt and confusion gave way to a deep-seated conviction.

Even today, with the expansion of Protestantism around the globe, and especially in China and Africa, where the churches are growing fastest, the gospel is spread not only by the study of scripture, but also in the powerful evangelical method of testimony—sharing stories of Christian life. The Holy Spirit is at work using culturally relevant stories to share the good news to each other. Here in America, the Holy Spirit breathes on us to do the same. Our stories resonate God’s activity in our lives and we are the best influencers to the people in our culture, family and friends. So, don’t be afraid, share what God is doing in your life with others.

At the end of today’s Gospel, it reads, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

This week in our vestry meeting, one member observed: What are other signs we have experienced of Christ that may not be written in the scriptures? Where do we see and experience Jesus in our world today that confirms our faith?

So maybe my wish for a single prayer to live as if truth were true, and that God's resurrection life will conquer all that threaten me and our world **is an ongoing process**, not a quick answering of prayer. It is a process that has to do with my believing and unbelieving. It is a process of observing where God is active in my world today. When Paul mentions the "power of the resurrection," he said that now our knowledge is partial, only a part of a part, like a "dim reflection" in a murky mirror.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who did not see and yet believed." Although today, we may never touch the scars on Jesus side nor in his hands. We can still see Christ through other signs that may not be written in the scripture. Signs in our humanitarian and philanthropic deeds. Signs when you serve hot food to the unhoused. Signs when we hear testimonies and stories of what God is doing in each other's lives. And even signs during our meditation quiet time with God. As

the Easter season progresses, may we discover God in our doubts and in our faith, saying with Thomas, "You are my Lord and my God!"

Amen.

And so Jesus's question to Martha ricochets down through history to us today: Do you believe this? And if you do, what difference does it make in your life? What

would resurrection faith look and feel like in the twenty-first century? What would it mean to live as if this truth were true?

Theologian Dan Clendenin, founder of the podcast, *Journey With Jesus* says, “Resurrection is a future hope that is presently unseen.” But this future hope is a concrete orientation that shapes everything we do and are. As we wait for the **Not Yet** of final resurrection, we live in the **Already** of what Jesus called an "abundant life.”

In his poem "The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," the poet-farmer Wendell Berry urges us to "practice resurrection." We can practice resurrection in many different ways (as his poem illustrates). Here's a good beginning:

- * welcome the stranger
- * visit the prisoner
- * shelter the homeless
- * feed the hungry
- * forgive one another
- * care for the widow

- * imitate the children
- * speak up for those who have no voice
- * honor and protect the dignity of every human being.

In short, to practice resurrection is to choose the life of Jesus!

This week, Pope Francis passed away. Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe said, “My heart is heavy at the death of our brother in Christ, Pope Francis, “Throughout his life and ministry, he has been a witness for the Gospel and a champion for the poor and marginalized. “Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis has consistently demonstrated a profound commitment to evangelization, to show justice, mercy, love and reconciliation. Francis, a Jesuit, was known for his humility and for standing with people living outside the mainstream, those excluded from social, economic and political systems, including the poor and migrants, as well as for his steadfast commitment to the environment. This is what a resurrection life looks like. In his last address to the crowd in St. Peter’s Square he says:

“The light of Easter impels us to break down the barriers that create division and are fraught with grave political and economic consequences. It impels us to care for one another, to increase our mutual solidarity, and to work for the integral development of each human person...

I appeal to all those in positions of political responsibility in our world not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads to isolation from others, but rather to use the resources available to help the needy, to fight hunger and to encourage initiatives that promote development. These are the “weapons” of peace: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death!”

Post-Easter, we are on this side of resurrection, we are people who experience God's power and inner transformation.

So maybe my wish for a single prayer to live as if truth were true, and that God's resurrection life will conquer all that threaten me **is an ongoing process**, not a final one. When Paul mentions the "power of the resurrection," he said that now our

knowledge is partial, only a part of a part, like a "dim reflection" in a murky mirror.

This is the beginning of the Easter season. May we run toward Jesus, the one risen liberating love. May we like Thomas find the arms of God wide open, and may we, like Thomas, open our arms to the newness of life offered in the embrace, and say, "You are my Lord and my God!"

Amen.