

Reflection on the Word – Easter 2, April 8, 2018 **Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; John 20:19-31**

Have you ever had the experience of leaving a room for just a little while and missed the best thing to happen ever? You run out for groceries, and your 11 month old son takes his first step. You go to the bathroom, and that's when the Canadian team scores, taking Olympic gold. You are expecting your daughter and her boyfriend to visit, but you insist to your spouse that you'll only be at the office for an hour. They arrive shortly after you leave and you miss the big announcement of their engagement.

That's kind of what happened to Thomas, isn't it? He had missed the best thing to happen ever. It is the evening of Easter day and the disciples, except for Thomas, are huddled together in a locked room, still fearful and uncertain, still trying to figure out what's just happened. And then along comes Jesus with a jolt of hope, an infusion of life-giving Spirit, and a gift of peace that passes all understanding.

So it is, that Easter becomes real for the disciples gathered there, as they come to know Jesus present and alive among them. But Thomas was out of the room! And when he gets back they all tell him "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas, however, doesn't feel the excitement, and in a statement that earns him the title of "Doubter", says he will only believe when he sees for himself.

To be fair, Thomas does not ask for anything more than all the others who got to see and hear the Risen Christ before they believed. Thomas simply says he needs the same level of proof; he just wants to experience what Jesus has so freely given the others. Thomas longs to come close, to embrace, to touch, so that he, too, may enter into the power of resurrection life. And a week later, Thomas gets what he asked for.

Jesus comes to his disciples again, and this time Thomas is present. Jesus says to him: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." In response, Thomas makes the most astounding confession of faith found in any of the gospels: "My Lord and my God."

These are just two of many resurrection appearances recounted for us by the gospel writers. Just two of those stories which remind us that Jesus comes to us in the midst of the everyday and meets us in the depths of our hearts where we hold fear and confusion, grief and uncertainty about what lies ahead. That in Jesus, risen and alive - among us and within us - we are not alone.

In the scripture from Acts, we also witness that resurrection faith at work --- empowering those first followers of Jesus to be the church. "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ..." They shared what they had, and there was not a needy person among them.

They were moved to action - as a community - witnessing to Christ "alive" in their world. And so it is for us. Because of the resurrection, we, too, travel a new path of life - from dying to living, from grief to wonder, from heartache to hope. Resurrection is about new ways of being and living in the very places where we find ourselves each and every day; in those situations where we thought we had failed or where there seemed to be little potential for newness and joy. The Easter stories are about new beginnings, and ultimately about love - a Love that is stronger than death.

So it is, that once the first followers left that locked room, they got down to business spreading good news and living in the light of God's amazing grace.

Jesus' appearance had set them 'on fire' to tell the story of their risen Lord and to take up the work of being and building the church of Christ.

Those verses which Jayme read earlier from Acts describe the gathered Christian church, and can be held up as a simple guide for an abundant life in faithful community. They contain principles practiced by the first century disciples which when implemented, translate into a sense of common purpose, a generosity of spirit and resources, a desire to dig deeply into scripture and participate regularly in worship, intentional and ongoing faith formation, an open door and a hearty welcome, a spirit of mission and service—all covered liberally with prayer and praise. Sounds like a good recipe for our own time, doesn't it?

But remember, all of this takes commitment and focus. Jesus demands 100 percent. He wants all of us—not just an hour a week or a place in the pew on high holy days, and not just a few dollars in an offering plate or service on a sometimes not-so-exciting church committee.

This is Good News we're talking about—life changing, world healing, community strengthening news.

Because they experienced Jesus alive and with them, those first followers gave themselves on behalf of the broken, bruised, and battered; they shared their lives with the least and the last. They had deep love for one another, tender compassion for their neighbors, and passionate devotion to God. Everywhere you looked, there were signs of resurrection. The early church was a vivid demonstration of the living Christ.

As we work together, in the spirit of the Psalmist who said: "*How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together in harmony!*" we too can witness powerfully to the presence of the living Christ. As we gather to break the bread, tell our stories, sing our songs, pray our prayers, bear witness to the good news, care for those in need, work for peace, and struggle for justice, we discover anew that Jesus is alive among us and that "great grace is upon us all."

Whenever I am tempted to doubt the Easter message, I call to mind some of the faces and the faithfulness of the people in this church I serve. When choir

members come weekly to rehearse so that they might lead and lift us to the praise of God; when sympathy and get well cards are sent; when the hungry and the lonely are served with a smile by workers in our community kitchen; when followers of Jesus pray for and visit the sick, I see signs of resurrection.

When an individual, tired from a busy week, carves out time to prepare a Sunday school lesson and comes on Sunday eager to welcome the children; when people laugh and cry together over the joys and disappointments of their lives; when the church opens its heart and its doors to whoever comes yearning for the love of God, excluding no one, I am convinced that Jesus is alive.

Jesus embraces the world with the arms of his followers-our arms. He speaks words of grace with our voices. He demands justice and offers peace through our deeds of witness and compassion. Over and over again, by God's grace, the simple and ordinary practices of the church are a means by which Jesus becomes real to us and to the community and world around us. They are the sights and sounds of Christ, alive in us, his body, the church; they are evidence for the truth of Easter, signs of resurrection hope and joy.

As we sang earlier – Christ is alive! No longer bound to distant years in Palestine – but saving, healing, here and now – through you and me – as we touch the lives of others in our own place and time. We are a resurrection people! Thanks be to God! Amen.