

Our Gospel for this morning is a familiar story. We know it well, at least those of us who come to worship on this Second Sunday of Easter. It is the appointed lesson for this day, every year, regardless of which series of lessons we happen to be following. And I’m sure you have sat through your share of sermons that have focused on poor old Thomas, who has, for his moment of questioning the witness of his comrades, forever borne the label, Doubting Thomas.

And the truth is, we should be grateful to poor old Thomas, for he is a lot like most of us, if we would be honest about it. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not the easiest truth to grasp and believe. I think Christians throughout the ages have struggled with what the church proclaims at Easter. And the fact that Thomas was not shunned by the other disciples, but together with them a week later, and the fact that he was not condemned by Jesus when he made his second appearance to the disciples, should give us all courage.

First, let us return to our Gospel lesson from last Sunday, the day of our Lord’s resurrection. There, Mark tells us, some women went to the tomb of Jesus early Sunday morning, two days following his death, to anoint Jesus’ body and assuage their grief. To their alarm, when they arrived at the tomb, the stone sealing it had already been moved, and the body of Jesus was not there.

Instead, a strange man, dressed in a white robe, was sitting in the tomb, who told the women, “If you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, he is not here. He has risen from the dead. Go and tell his disciples that he will meet them in Galilee.” But the women left, Mark tells us, seized by terror and amazement, and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And with those words, many Biblical scholars believe, the oldest copy of the Gospel of Mark ends.

Well, given the social and political culture of that day, had those women chosen to go to the disciples and tell them what they had experienced at the tomb, their story may well have been dismissed as some sort of idle tale, or delusional thinking due to their grief. The unfortunate truth is, women of that day, in that region, had little standing, as is still evident in the lives of women in the Middle East.

But today’s Gospel is a different story. John tells us that the disciples of Jesus are gathered behind locked doors, in fear of the Jewish authorities. The threat to their lives was real. Not only did the disciples fear that they might also be accused and sentenced to the same death that Jesus had to endure because of their association with him, but according to Matthew, additional charges loomed against them. They were accused of stealing a corpse and perpetuating a hoax, both crimes punishable by death.

But amid their fear, in the relative safety of their tightly locked door, the risen Christ came and stood among them. Just imagine the suspense of that moment! Here they were, huddled in fear for their lives, and their crucified and risen master comes and stands in their midst. I can picture Peter being the first to fall to the floor, trembling in total despair for having denied even knowing Jesus. I can picture the rest of the disciples following suit, for they all deserted him. I can imagine the fear that they felt from those whom they felt might do them bodily harm was totally replaced by total fear and awe of being in the presence of the risen Christ.

And what is the very first word that the risen Christ says to them? “Peace be with you,” he says. “Calm down,” he says. “Do not be afraid,” he says. I think we could even phrase it another way, without damaging the text, by translating it as “I love you” or “I forgive you!”

Then, after showing them the agonizing wounds of his crucifixion, as if to assure them that it was indeed Jesus, he again said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” And with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church was born.

A week later, this scene is repeated, only this time Thomas is present with the other disciples. Again, huddled behind locked doors, Jesus comes and stands amid the disciples, and says those same words, “Peace be with you.” And without condemnation, he offers to Thomas the proof that would answer his doubt, although there is no hint that Thomas touched the risen Christ. He simply makes the profound statement, “My Lord and my God!”

The resurrected Christ returns to and appears before the very same ragtag group of people who so disappointed him, misunderstood him, forsaken him, and fled into the darkness. He returns to his betrayers. He returns to us... That’s what you see in today’s Gospel from John: the followers of Jesus hunkered down alone, behind locked doors, but then the risen Christ comes to

them. They are full of fear and doubt. They don't come to him. He comes to them.

This is the dynamic of the Easter message. Think about it. We don't find Jesus; he finds us. The women set out on that first Easter morning to anoint the dead body of Jesus, but they didn't find him. He is not there in the tomb, where they thought he would be. Instead, a man in a white robe tells them he has risen and to tell the disciples to return to Galilee, where the risen Jesus would meet them.

And in today's Gospel, the terrified disciples are not out seeking to find the risen Christ. They are huddled behind locked doors, in fear for their very life, and the risen Jesus comes and finds them, appears to them, and empowers them to go and tell others about his victory over sin and death.

Perhaps Thomas expresses this dynamic best. After hearing the disciples' report that the risen Christ appeared to them, he does not go to the tomb to confirm that it is empty. He does not go searching the streets to find the risen Christ. He simply joins the others who cower behind locked doors in fear for his life, continuing to question in his heart what the disciples proclaimed, and the risen Christ comes and finds him. May we, through the power of God's Spirit, come to trust and believe those final words of Jesus, that even though we have not had the chance to personally see him risen from the dead, we can trust that he still seeks us and comes to us.

We ask of Jesus, 'Show us what God looks like!' God? God is the shepherd who doesn't just sit back and wait for the lost sheep to head back home: Go goes out, risks everything, beats the bushes night and day, and finds that lost sheep...

Christians are the people who don't simply know something the world does not yet know or believe something that non-Christians don't yet believe. We are the people who have had something happen to us that the world has yet to experience. The risen Christ has come back to us. Jesus is present to us, despite us. Therefore, we do not live alone...

When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, time and again we look up and realize that we're not walking by ourselves. When we come to a dead end in life, we look over the brink, into the dark abyss, and, to our surprise and delight, there he is, awaiting us. We give up, give in, come to despair, and find him near to us...

“Christ Comes to Us” John 20:19-31 Easter 2 2026

In life, in death, in life beyond death, this is our hope. Our faith rests upon an experience, upon countless experiences of Christ’s presence. The risen Christ has come back to us. Amen.