

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter
April 27, 2025
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Acts 5:27-32
Psalm 150
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

One of my favorite lesser-known Episcopal traditions for the second Sunday of Easter, is called Bright Sunday. It's a low Sunday, and a special day in which humor is not only allowed, but encouraged.

- Such as the goings on with children.

I heard tell of a Sunday School teacher.

She asked her children as they were on the way back into church service after children's chapel:

"And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?"

One boy replied, 'Because people are sleeping.'

- Or the mother at dinner who turned to their six-year-old daughter and said,

'Would you like to say the blessing?'

'I wouldn't know what to say,' the girl replied.

'Just say what you hear Mommy say,' the wife answered.

The daughter bowed her head and said,

'Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?'

What better day than Bright Sunday to talk about the Apostle Thomas. Doubting Thomas. Poor boy!

For nearly 2,000 years Thomas has been yoked with the epithet evoked by anyone who wants to flaunt their faith.

"Don't be a Doubting Thomas. You have to have faith."

I think Thomas gets a bad rap here. Is he asking all that much?

All he's saying is that he doesn't believe what the disciples are telling him. Hey, they didn't believe Mary when she said the exact same thing to them. They had to go see for themselves.

Why should Thomas believe them anymore than they believed Mary.

All he asks is what any of us would ask

– particularly for those of us

who still think this is an age of science and reason.

Epistemology is the fancy word for the study of how we know what we know. According to Aristotle

and the applications of his theories by Augustine of Hippo,

we truly KNOW only those things that we have personally encountered through our five senses.

Unless you have been to Egypt and seen the pyramids,

you only BELIEVE that the pyramids exist,
you can't KNOW that they exist. And we want to KNOW.
Thomas wanted to know.
How can we fault his impulse.

Anyone who has been educated in the hard sciences
or even exposed to them will ask for proof.
Are the phenomena you are describing observable?
Are the results you report able to be reproduced?
What was the methodology you used
to achieve the results you are reporting?

I mean, where do the disciples get off criticizing Thomas.
They've been locked in a room, hiding in the corners,
afraid of shadows on the wall.
Then Jesus shows up in person and says to them directly:
Shalom Aleichem – “peace be upon you”.
I'd be willing to bet they all jumped, because, apparently,
they were too shocked to return his greeting.
Then Jesus shows them the wounds and convinces them of who he is.

Of course, Thomas was not with them, so they tell him,
“We have seen the Lord.”

And he says what they thought when Mary said the same thing:
“yeah, right. I'll believe that when I see it. I'm from Missouri.
You'll have to show me.”
Sounds perfectly reasonable to me.
And it is a problem in reading the text
because for most people this story from the Gospel is all about Thomas,
his doubt and his judgment.
But I think that blocks us from hearing what the story is really about.
Like all the Gospels, the stories, like this story,
are about Jesus and the love he bears for the disciples
and for each and every one of us.

So the next week we find Thomas in the room, and Jesus again shows up,
and tells Thomas “don't doubt, but believe.”
Jesus is not criticizing or judging Thomas.
He actually gives Thomas exactly what he asks for.
He gives Thomas what he needs to bolster his faith.
Jesus reaches out to his friends,
and touches their lives in a truly deep and meaningful way,
so that they can witness to what they have seen.
Jesus gives them a gift of faith.

The difficulty here is the word BELIEF.
I think what the text really means is TRUST.
Jesus is asking that Thomas have faith in God
– to understand that there are things we cannot KNOW,

but only have faith that they exist. Trust God.

After Easter Monday's sad event, I sought comfort in a movie.

So I watched again *Conclave*, last year's film about the passing of the Pope and the ensuing selection of the next Pontiff.

In his opening sermon to the conclave, Cardinal Lawrence, who is dean of the College of Cardinals and convenor of the Conclave, preaches the need for tolerance, and that the strength of the church is its variety and diversity, which gives the church its unity.

He goes on to say there is one sin he fears above all others – Certainty.

“Certainty is the great enemy of unity” and the deadly enemy of tolerance.

Even Christ at the end was not certain.

He cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

“Our faith is a living thing precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty and no doubt there would be no mystery. And therefore no need for faith.”

And much to the chagrin of the assembled Cardinals, he prays for a pope who doubts.

We live by FAITH. An essential element to FAITH is DOUBT.

Without DOUBT, FAITH cannot exist.

Without DOUBT there is only certainty. Certainty defies Faith.

We have all been given a gift in Easter, a gift greater than we can ever comprehend:

A gift beyond all gifts – the gift of the assurance that God loves us more than we can ever know.

That is the peace that Jesus gives us, the freedom from the anxiety and uncertainty that God's love is true.

In his last public address in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis declared the reality of Easter:

“Love has triumphed over hatred, light over darkness and truth over falsehood.

Forgiveness has triumphed over revenge. Evil has not disappeared from history;

it will remain until the end, but it no longer has the upper hand;

it no longer has power over those who accept the grace of this day. ...

“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...”
Amen.*