

SUN, APR 16
9AM & 11AM



Resurrection
Blessings
EASTER
SEASON

“Resurrection Blessings”

April 16, 2023 | 2nd Sunday of Easter

Rev. Peder Johanson | John 20:19-31

Good morning. On behalf of the staff and the board of the Triangle Community Ministry, and on behalf of the residents with whom we walk beside in neighborly love, I bring greetings and gratitude.

I’m not here today to talk about all the ins and outs of our organization, but I am compelled to give thanks today to all of you for the support of this congregation.

We are in our 45th year as an organization, sharing a ministry of presence with the people of the Triangle Neighborhood, and we could not serve as effectively without the financial support and volunteer support we receive from Covenant and other congregations in the Madison area.

Thank you for keeping us in your mission support, in your prayers, and in your acts of service in the name of the risen Christ. **Christ *is* risen – Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!**

It is an honor and holy privilege to be with you this morning in this season of Easter to celebrate the risen Christ, and to share a message of this good news for us, for the church, and for all creation.

I understand you are familiar with and often put to use the revised common lectionary – the ecumenically selected readings for each Sunday throughout the liturgical year.

And so, you may be familiar with this story, as it is assigned each year for the second Sunday of Easter. It picks up in John’s gospel where the resurrection story ends: when it was evening on *that day...the first day of the week...the day that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.*

As John tells the story, Mary walks there by herself, alone in the dark, before the sunrise. John doesn't say why...perhaps it was to weep there, to feel some sense of closure, or to make some sense of what had happened. (Whatever the reason, we know from the story that she wasn't expecting what she found – or what was to come...)

Upon seeing the stone rolled away from the tomb, presuming it to be empty, she runs to tell the others that they – the ones who murdered their Lord, their teacher, their beloved Jesus – had taken his body.

I imagine her frantic words, her racing heart, her shaking hands, and trembling voice – the anger, the fear, the agitated trauma all coming out at once.

Peter and the beloved disciple race back with her, to the tomb. They find it empty and come to the same conclusion. Then these two other disciples leave her, there by the tomb, to weep alone again.

John's story goes on to tell of two angels in the tomb who ask her why she is weeping.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she answers, “and I don't know where they've laid him.”

Then she turns and sees Jesus, thinks him the gardener, and asks *him* where the Lord's body has been laid.

Jesus calls her name, she sees him, they exchange words of love and hope, and she is sent as the first apostle to tell the others that he is risen.

This is all just to set the context for what was going on *when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week.*

John sets the scene in a locked house where the disciples were gathered. It's possible they've been hiding here all along, since that terrible day of crucifixion – behind locked doors – for fear that they might be next, being known as Jesus' inner circle.

That's probably where Mary found them that morning...waking them with the

shockingly terrible news of a desecrated tomb and stolen body. Then again later with the shockingly impossible news that he was risen.

Put yourselves there, if you can.

Have you ever received word of something so terrible or impossibly wonderful so as to be unbelievable?

Have you ever been through something so tragic or traumatic as to leave you stuck behind locked doors – physical or metaphorical?

Can you imagine holding such a lived experience as the disciples leading up to that day (or of that morning) and holding it in tension with Mary's impossible news of the risen Lord?

Can we imagine what those gathered in that house on that night were thinking and feeling?

I think it's fair to say that what they needed more than anything in that moment was no less than to see and experience the risen Christ.

This is one of my favorite actions of Jesus in John's gospel – and there are so many...so many moments where he shows this divine depth of compassion. The risen Christ arrives: alive with wounded hands and side, with words of peace, with the breath of the Holy Spirit, with gifts for them of blessing and power to carry that holy moment beyond the locked doors and walls of that house into a hurting world.

So beautiful, isn't it? So perfect. So right.

Only, Thomas missed it.

I, for one, think he got a bad deal that day. *And* throughout history, with that unfortunate nickname – you know the one.

Can any blame him for his response? For his "doubt"? Doubt, that probably has *nothing* to do with skepticism.

First of all, we don't know where Thomas was that night. We don't know why he

wasn't there. But it's worth thinking about the fact that he was somewhere else doing something else while all the others were *hiding* in a safehouse.

Second, by this point in the gospel, Thomas has earned a reputation for being faithful and courageous...look at the story of Lazarus (John 11:16) for an example.

So perhaps he was the one who volunteered to risk being seen in that dangerous time to go out and secure food for those back at the house. Or to bring news and comfort to others in hiding; a ministry of presence to the faithful, hurting remnant of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.

We don't know. Nor do we know whether he was aware of Mary's message from earlier in the day. But regardless, it's not fair to think he was anything less than the faithful and brave disciple we know him to be.

And, of course, wherever he was and whatever he was doing, it was with a spirit that had been utterly crushed.

How would I feel in his shoes, I wonder?

How would any of us react to the news of Jesus' appearance for the others? If, indeed, it was true...well, he needed that too, didn't he?

More than anything in those moments of that day, Thomas needed nothing less than to see and experience the risen Christ...alive with wounded hands and side, with a living voice of peace, with the living breath of Holy Spirit, and with the gift of blessing and healing for his broken heart and shattered spirit.

We cannot overstate the depth of trauma that Thomas and the others experienced in those days, nor the significance of grief that weighed them down. Of course, he couldn't take their word as sufficient for healing and moving forward.

Now the way I read this story, the way I hear it, and, hopefully, the way I tell it, Jesus' second visit a week later (*the second Sunday of the resurrection*) wasn't at all about admonishing Thomas for his doubt, for his week-long struggle to believe the good news. It is all blessing.

It is true to the Christ we have known all along in the sacred story of John's gospel, the

Christ who is alive among the people, motivated by love. *For God so loved the world, that God sent the only son. 3:16.*

It is this same Christ, sent and ever motivated by the divine love of God, receiving the broken, the outcast and the downtrodden, with boundless compassion, speaking love, granting grace, and offering blessing to heal and give life.

That is the Jesus, the Messiah, the son of the living God whom we have seen and known all along in this sacred story.

That is the Jesus who shows up again to greet Thomas *with exactly what he needed*. Among the faithful – some like Mary, with hearts full and on fire for the risen Christ; some like Thomas, weary and broken and wondering if and when and how he'll ever move forward; and, likely, most of them somewhere in between – Jesus comes again.

Among the gathered faithful, with all they are and all they have, and with all their need, Jesus comes again.

And, as we see with Thomas, he comes *to give faith where there is doubt*. **That is, to give strength where there is weakness. To give hope where there is despair. To give peace where there is pain. To give healing where there is brokenness. To give life.**

That is the promise of this gospel.

That is the power of the resurrection.

That is the blessing for us here as we gather with all that we are, all that we have, and with all of our need.

That is holy work we are blessed to share beyond these doors and walls as we walk together in the way of the risen Christ.

Thank you, once more, for walking the way of Christ as you do in loving service to your neighbors. And thanks be to God. Amen.