

Second Sunday in Easter
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Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. John M. Pitzer

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

So it was eight years ago this weekend, not eight years ago this date, because Easter moves with the calendar. It's at different times of the year.

But it was eight years ago this weekend, the first Sunday after Easter, that I preached my very first homily sermon to Trinity Episcopal Church. Amazing how time flies when you're having fun. I'm telling you, it's hard to believe it's been eight years.

But I can tell you, even though I may not remember exactly what I said, I can tell you what the gospel was. Because it's the first Sunday after Easter. And I don't care if you attend an Episcopal Church, or a Roman Catholic Church, or a Methodist, or a Lutheran, if you follow a lectionary, the first Sunday after Easter is always the gospel about Thomas.

Now, it may be from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, but it's always a version of. And in the last eight years since I first preached for you, my view or my thoughts on Thomas haven't really changed. They also haven't really changed since I was in the seminary many years ago when I was a Dominican friar studying in St. Louis, Missouri.

It was then that one of my theology professors, a Dominican nun who was teaching theology, said kind of off the cuff that Thomas gets a bad rap. Thomas gets a bad rap. Why does he get a bad rap? What do we call Thomas? Doubting Thomas.

So she said that and kept going on with her lecture, and I thought, well, this is kind of interesting. What does she mean, he gets a bad rap?

So I went up to her afterwards and I said, why do you think that Thomas gets a bad rap? And she said, Thomas gets a bad rap because it never said he didn't believe. It said he doubted, but he was seeking.

He was looking for something. That's different than not believing at all. And it's funny because, you know, you and I as adults, when we're children, we believe just about anything that's told to us.

We believe anything that our parents tell us. We might even believe what our big brother and big sister tell us. We might believe everything our teachers tell us.

But as we get older, we become a bit jaded, and we start losing, not losing spiritual faith, but we kind of start losing faith in humanity. And we don't always believe everything that we learned before. So you would think that we would give Thomas a break.

And yet when we hear this story every year right after Easter, we find ourselves subconsciously saying, oh, come on, Thomas, you're still doubting? What's wrong, buddy? He should have got his stuff together, and he should have believed. Well, it's easy for us because we know the rest of the story. It's easy for us to believe.

It was not easy for Thomas. He was living in a world of chaos. Now, we think we're living in a world of chaos right now.

It's really no different. 2,000 years ago, the Roman authorities were pretty hard on the Jewish community. Not pretty hard.

They were incredibly hard. They made life miserable for them. And then all of a sudden, here comes this Jesus, and he has these followers, and they follow him, and they witness miracle after miracle, and have this intimate relationship with him, if you will.

And then all of a sudden, he is arrested, and he's crucified, and their world collapses. Literally, their world is in chaos.

She's beautiful, by the way.

Wow. Did you see this baby staring up at me right now? Goodness gracious. So no wonder he was seeking.

What he was doing was looking for signs of hope. When Thomas was seeking, when Thomas was looking, when Thomas was questioning, he was looking for signs of hope. And eventually, as we heard in the gospel, that's what happened.

The most hopeful sign that he could receive, he actually had Jesus appear in front of him and say, peace be with you. My friends, maybe, just maybe, Thomas needs to be a role model for us. Maybe Thomas needs to be our prayer partner, if you will.

Thomas needs to set the example, because you and I are constantly, in this world of chaos, are seeking answers. All of us are seeking answers. So what do you do if we're looking for hopeful signs? What are the hopeful signs for today? They can be big and bold, or they can be small and little.

I'm going to give you just a couple of examples of signs of hope. You could come up with your own, and I know you can, and many of you will, but here are some examples. Here are some examples of hope.

Last night, I was called to Oxford Hospital about 9 p.m. to be with one of our parishioners who was very ill. She's better. But I threw my clerics on, and I ran up to the hospital, and I got down, and I got down right next to her, and she turned around, and she looked at me, and she said, well, hello, John.

That warmed my heart. My friends, that was a sign of hope. A very good friend of mine just received, about a year ago, a challenging health diagnosis, a form of blood cancer, and his doctor told him recently, J.T., I cannot cure you, but I can get you in remission, and while you're in remission, who knows what drugs are going to come along.

And he's telling me the story of this a few weeks ago when I was in Memphis with a big tear streaming down his face with a smile because the doctor said, I'm going to keep you in remission. My friends, that is a sign of hope. How many of you followed the astronauts this week? Amazing, wasn't it? The picture that everybody was talking about, the picture that was taken, you could see this gigantic moon, and way off in the distance was a picture of Mother Earth.

It was all over social media. You see that picture? How can you not have hope? In a world that is chaotic and crazy. What about the birth of a child? Will she come to me? Oh my goodness.

God bless you. Check this out. This, my friends, is a sign of hope.

This right here is a sign of hope. And you and I need hopeful signs like never before. So when you are having a moment of doubt, when you are having a moment of questioning, just like Thomas, when you don't know which direction to go in the midst of the chaotic world, think of this.

Think of this young baby, or whatever hopeful sign comes to your mind. And then, together, we can all say the words that Thomas says. My Lord and my God.

Amen.