

Prayer: How awesome are your ways, O God! With thanksgiving, we offer praise for the work you brought in Christ. In gladness, we thank you for hiding us deeply into his sacred life. We bless you for raising us in and with Jesus Christ, giving us the power to proclaim with Mary Magdalene, the Risen One, not only with our voices, but with our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

“It’s Monday After Easter...Now What?”

In our society, there are two great religious holidays each year—Christmas and Easter. For most of us, Christmas is the bigger and greater season of the year. It’s the time when we gather with family and friends. We sing, we celebrate, we laugh, and we exchange presents. Christmas is the climax of the whole year. And Easter? For most people it’s just another long weekend, a break in the dreary stretch between Christmas and summer vacation. Even some Christians view Easter as a second-rate holiday.

It is the great miracle of Easter that gives Christmas its true meaning. Somehow, we’ve gotten our thinking badly mixed up. If Easter had not happened, Christmas would have no meaning. If Easter had not happened, Christmas would be nothing more than a sweet-sounding fable. If Easter is not true, then Christmas is only the story of an obscure baby born in an out-of-the-way town in a forgotten land 2000 years ago. It is the great miracle of Easter that gives Christmas its true meaning.

We hope and pray everyone had a beautiful Easter! For many, the celebration presents the opportunity to invite friends and family to church for the first time. It’s an occasion that offers a wonderful introduction to Jesus Christ and the meaning of his death and resurrection. As Christians, we know that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith.

It goes without saying that Easter is a big deal in church. Along with Christmas, Easter is the Super Bowl of the church year. We expend the most energy on what we do and often have the most people at our buildings and campuses. Easter is a big deal.

Last week was fantastic, wasn’t it? The church was full of people who wanted to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. We had a tremendous Sunrise Breakfast, great time to fellowship, and then we came into worship. We worshipped The Holy Trinity with fantastic music to help us worship the one who died and rose for us. God moved, and it was a great day.

Easter usually is, isn’t it? It is a special time of excitement and celebration, even for those who don’t believe in Jesus. There are eggs to hunt, candy to eat, and pretty clothes to wear.

What happened on Monday, though? Some of you may have had a day off, but by Tuesday, life was back to normal for most of the world. Kids were back at school, work was still work, and the Easter candy was marked down to 80% off.

You know, that happened on the first Easter too? When Jesus was crucified, all of Jerusalem knew about it. I am sure that there was a buzz in town when they found out that the body was gone and that some were saying he had been raised from the dead. However, like everything else sensational in our world, the buzz started to fade. In those first few weeks after the Resurrection, the world at large continued going about their business.

In fact, even Jesus’ closest followers quickly found themselves returning back to the lives they had led. We find that in John 21. It had been some time since Jesus had last appeared to the disciples, and it appears that they were getting antsy.

So here we are. One week after Easter. How was this week for you? How are you today, exactly one week after Easter? Is the excitement of Easter still in you? Has it begun to fade? Has it vanished all together? I ask these

questions because in our text today, we find the disciples exactly one week after Easter. Before dealing fully with how we feel, let's begin to understand how these disciples of Christ are doing one week after Easter.

Our text of John gives us a quick glimpse back to Easter and the splendid revelation of God's glory in Christ's resurrection. The disciples are huddled in fear behind a locked door when Jesus appears to them, and when he does - he not only reveals his resurrection, he breathes an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them.

Now, for some reason Thomas was absent from the disciples. He didn't get to see Jesus that night. Now the other disciples are sharing the wonderful news with him. "We have seen the Lord!" But what proof do they bring? Only their words. John earlier in his gospel has already described Thomas as a courageous pessimist, and as an honest skeptic, so it is not surprising that his response is "Not gonna believe it till I see it."

This catches us up with the heart of today's lesson. One week after Easter, the very same room where Jesus appeared before... Eleven disciples sit in excitement (however I find it quite funny they are still behind locked doors) but yes, I imagine them sitting in excitement. And Thomas probably sitting with his arms crossed, ankles crossed, and brow furrowed.

This is the stage set. Eleven disciples who "know" and wait anxiously; one disciple who doubts, who only has the words of the other disciples to go by. He doubts.

Here, I want to pull back a bit. I think it is far too easy for us to look disagreeably to Thomas. I think it is easy to make him into a "straw man" and blow him over with the verse "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." HA! Silly Thomas.

And yet, if every one of us was honest with themselves, we would see that Thomas is not the loneliest Christian ever. I would venture a guess, that every one of us at some point has walked side by side with Thomas in the state of doubt. It is our very nature to doubt what we cannot see. It might as well be us sitting there with the eleven, arms crossed, ankles crossed, and brow furrowed.

This part of our human nature reminds me of a story I once heard of a man out on a splendid nature walk next to some beautiful cliffs and caverns. The walk, however, quickly turned less splendid when the man walking too close to the edge found himself tumbling down the side of one of the cliffs. Luckily, he managed to grab hold of a small tree growing out of the side of the cliff. Unluckily, it was too steep to climb up or down, he was far too high to jump, and he knew he was likely the only person for miles.

Having nothing to lose, he began to shout "Help. Is anybody out there? HELP!"

After a short while he heard a response, "This is God. I am here. Let go of that branch and I will catch you." The man contemplated this, and responded, "God, don't you have a rope or a ladder?" God replied, "Put your faith in me. Let go of that branch and I will catch you." The man contemplated yet again, and after a long pause he shouted, "Is anyone else there?"

Believing without seeing. Thomas doubted, yes. And yet, which of us can claim to throw the first stone at him. Which of us has never had the smallest bit of doubt. Perhaps we have looked to the trouble of the world, the pain, the injustice, the senseless violence, and have thought, "How can a good God let bad things happen?" Perhaps we have been challenged by competing beliefs of many different religions. Or perhaps we are just like Thomas, and struggle to believe the words of others, wishing we could have first-hand knowledge for ourselves.

Luckily for Thomas and for us, that is not the end of the text. Thomas is not left sitting there doubting. The text now turns to him with a wonderful message of grace. Jesus appears in the room with all 12 disciples, and he directly addresses Thomas.

Jesus knew he doubted. Jesus knew he had been excluded from the special revelation the night he appeared to the other eleven. Jesus even knew what that whole last week must have been like for Thomas.

Just ponder that for a moment the only disciple left out. The only disciple with nothing but words to go by. The one disciple most like us today. And Thomas, the one left out, spent that entire week wrestling alone with his doubts.

Now, Jesus does not lecture him, chastise him, or discipline him for doubting, instead Jesus wished him peace, and in his mercy, gave Thomas that which he needed to move beyond his doubt.

And here is the truly marvelous thing about this text. It is at this moment that something new happens. All throughout the book of John, Jesus is Lord to his disciples, to Mary Magdalene, to all his followers and now and only now, Thomas proclaims, “My Lord and my God.” He gets it. Not only does he get it, but he gets in a deeper and much more profound way. Jesus who was once just Lord has now become Lord and God.

Like Thomas, there are times we will be challenged. We will doubt. The very best news of all is that God doesn’t let us sit forever arms crossed, ankles crossed, and brow furrowed. In our time of doubt, we will search, examine, question, and we too can gain a stronger and deeper understanding of faith, of God, and of our relationship with him.

One week after Easter. One short week. In that crowded little room, door locked, sitting with the other 11. Where do you sit? Do you sit with Thomas, as one seeking? Do you sit with the 11, still excited and buzzing? Perhaps you sit on your own, neither excited nor doubting.

How about you? What is your Monday after Easter like?

- Did you carry the joy of Resurrection Sunday with you into your home this week and love your family and neighbors like Jesus had been raised?
- Did you do your best in your classes because you are serving a living Savior?
- Did you cry out for help to fight against sin and live a God-honoring life because you knew that Jesus had defeated sin and death for you?
- Does your life show that the resurrection happened and changed things, or are you going back to what you were doing, living as if nothing ever happened? Doubting?
- Maybe God hasn’t come through on your timetable, and you’re a little upset, so upset that you’ve decided to just go back to the way things used to be.

This Second Sunday of Easter, I want you to hear this: Jesus isn’t gone because Easter is over. Life is still hard, situations don’t work out in your timing, and you still have to fight temptations. As we look at the disciples and their desire to turn away this morning, I want you to acknowledge the fact that Jesus is still with you, still risen, and still the conqueror of death and sin today.

Wherever you are today, I encourage you to look to Thomas not as a bad example to be avoided, but rather as our representative in that room, as one who has other people’s word and not first-hand experience. And Jesus stands before us inviting us to see the wounds and touch his side, so that we may know the truth, and stand again with Thomas to say “My Lord and my God.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.