

Rev. Todd Hoeffs

Easter 2

Message for gathering the scattered

John 20:19ff

April 19, 2020

The Lord be with you, dear people of God.

Today is the 2nd Sunday of our Easter celebration.

The church has historically called this New Born Baby Sunday.

And not because a lot of babies are born on this day. ☺

But in ancient times when Christians were threatened with death by Roman persecution, many people got baptized at Easter time. So the Sunday following Easter celebrated this new gift of faith, as new born infant believers. As infants crave milk, so infant believers crave God's Word.

Easter truly is the new day - - for our world, for all people, for you and me... because Jesus rose from the dead.

On a Sunday.

As the body of the Christ scattered over the entire globe.

And our new-born identity came to life in our baptisms.

Both God's Word and simple water continually reminds us that baptism is our new creation in Christ and every Sunday is the new day for our renewal. Recreating people daily into the image of the Lord of Life, Who died, and yet lives!

Baptism gives the gift of faith,

Sustains faith,

Supports faith,

Filling us with the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit Who guides us and guards us and keeps us connected to Christ for strength and hope—

What sin & death have absolutely ruined in us, baptism totally transforms!

Our tomb like vacant hearts now have the living Christ as we are his living church, His active living Body in the world, as faithful infant believers.

Water and the Word even helps with the memory of God's goodness daily,

As we're confronted with our shortcomings

And confronted with the harmful ways this affects and those in our lives,

And yet comforted by the grace of God which covers us, making us new again.

So with this living faith & newness of life,

what about all this fear & doubt in that upper room of the disciples?

They're afraid.

The powers that be killed their messiah, their Lord, their teacher.

Mother Mary & Mary Magdalene watched Jesus die on the cross.

Mary Magdalene herself proclaimed a very convincing Gospel sermon to Peter & the other disciples to no avail. She saw the angel, heard the message, the empty tomb, then Jesus in the garden!

Peter & John saw the empty tomb and folded grave clothing.
But then they all hid.
But they really didn't have to hide.
John's Gospel has the Greek word for fear that's like our English word - Phobia. It's imagined or real fear. Critical stressful danger or perceived trouble.
Whether or not anyone in power would've killed them we don't know.
But Fear. Worry. Isolation. Have gripped them.
Closed off. Even to what they've been told & believed by Jesus beforehand.
A closed mind is an empty mind
A closed heart is an empty heart.
A closed life is an empty life.
They need to trust.
Remember. Jesus said he'd die and rise
What did that mean to them?
Not a physical earthly death I suppose.
Such a tragedy. Fear can swallow you up, like an anchor weighing you down.
Nonetheless, must as they really needed the fear swept away,
Jesus visits them.
In his new resurrected glorified body.
Giving them PEACE.
Breathing on them the new living breath....His Spirit...more than just the life in our lungs. It's spirit & life. A sacred breath. Like we all received in our baptisms.
What a joy!
They see & believe. They rejoice!
Fear is gone. Hope lives.
One guy is missing this day.
Thomas.
So much he knew, so much he didn't understand.
When Jesus once spoke of how people must follow Him, Thomas quickly said how do we follow we don't even know the way!?
He doesn't see a dead Jesus as providing any way.
He wants to see the living Jesus. The glorified Jesus. Or he will not believe.
We often call this doubting. But its not really doubt.
It's more of hearing news but the message doesn't or can't take root.
That happens a lot when people 1st hear their loved one is dead. Denial. Disbelief.
Fear can be an obstacle.
Or human pride. Thomas is adamant.
I will not believe it.
Doubt is not the opposite of faith
Faith can doubt.
Faith does doubt.
Faith looks for hope to trust
Faith is like a muscle. Faith needs exercise, discipline, correction, feeding —

Faith doubts because it actually takes God seriously.

Faith doubts because it expects some thing from God that he's not producing in the way we need or want it.

If Jesus died, then came back to life, Thomas wants to experience that!

Like the rest.

That's what he needs.

We as believers in Christ need not fear doubts nor be hard on those that do. Solid faith doubts.

Weak faith doesn't. Weak faith can be oblivious and easily uprooted. Weak faith can live on the surface never reaching down deep for more comfort, more hope, more peace.

Doubts needs help to get through.

We have doubts.

Lots of them.

We doubt life will be reopened any time soon from COVID 19

Many are preparing for a long time without stores or restaurants or businesses open

We doubt life will ever BE normal again the way we knew it.

We doubt we will treat each other as we had before.

Thomas isn't doubting because he was missing out —

But He desires the presence and transformation that the others received

He wants a reason to keep on believing

Do you ever need a reason to keep going on?

What makes you forge ahead?

What keeps you isolated in your homes now is self care and care for your neighbor

It may save many lives.

Disciples had been isolated due to fear

Fear of those who killed their rabbi, their lord

We don't necessarily fear our faith will depart because we're not able to gather in here.

We fear this situation will drag on & on & other viruses will emerge.

Maybe worse.

But God is in control.

He holds heaven and earth in His hands,

Because His Son's Hands held you and your future with nails.

He makes you what you are.

I know your faith is solid. Even with doubts.

You've been baptized.

You're a believer.

Even if you're skeptical or a seeker or really lost, maybe you feel hopeless or going crazy under lockdown,

the Word of God is here & is available to you on your phone screens if not in a Bible in your dresser drawer which brings faith & still feeds faith.

Through amazing gifts in technology, you can still hear that your sins are forgiven, that Jesus' peace is yours, that you are still valued by the Lord who still visits you the way you need

Be it through family or friends or helpers in your community.

Texts and messages and facetime.

Many show the face of Christ –

Even though our church buildings are closed CHRIST is very visible in the numerous people out in the world who have faith & believe & serve all in need.

Jesus even works through those who may not believe but encounter your face showing the love of Jesus to them.

Because others signs happened not written in John's Gospel.

But what has been written is so that we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing we all have life in His name.

That is the on-going message of Easter

Jesus may not appear in your living room showing you nail holes or a spear scar in His side.

But He fills your heart with joy & hope.

Even when you get scared and you will again....many times after,

But Jesus is still here.

In your life, in your heart, in your life.

This helps you trust Him. You can rely on Him. He will bring you through this virus time safely.

Your faith intact.

Doubts & all.

Amen.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Jesus and Thomas

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin[c]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The Purpose of This Book

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

31 But these are written so that you may come to believe[d] that Jesus is the Messiah,[e] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.