

“What Does It Take?”  
John 20:19-31  
Second Sunday of Easter (B)  
April 8, 2018  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

John 20:19-31 (NRSV) Jesus Appears to the Disciples

<sup>19</sup> 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.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> 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

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[c]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Last Sunday, we began RE-proclaiming, with awe and joy: “He is risen!”

That was the theme for the day, the truth renewed and declared again.

The stone was rolled away!

There was an empty tomb.

The women came, with the spices, to prepared Jesus’ body for burial; they’d had to hurry the day before because of the Passover laws.

Do you remember?

They saw the man (an angel don’tcha think?) sitting in the tomb. It wasn’t Jesus but he had that message for them that was NOT “April Fool!” He said, “He is not here.”

The women left the tomb abruptly... Mark’s gospel ended there.

Even if they had some fear, I think it was many different levels and kinds of fear. They'd never experienced something like this!

I also think, that those women believed and ran to tell the others.

WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE THEM!!!

Empty tomb!?

Luke even wrote, in his gospel, "[the] words seemed to them an idle tale."

So when we read what happened next, we have to wonder what was going through their minds.

They refused to believe the women until they could see with their own eyes.

Peter and John ran to the tomb; John didn't have to go inside.

He saw the emptiness.

But an empty tomb still doesn't prove the Resurrection does it?

And then, as David read for us, even behind a locked door, where the followers were huddled, scared about repercussions for their loyalty, *"Jesus came and stood among them. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."*

They got it!

They became FIRST HAND witnesses of the Resurrected Lord!

But Thomas wasn't there.

His story is one we also repeat every Easter time.

Just as there were disbelievers at the tomb, Thomas is a holdout in the Upper Room.

What a day!

First the women couldn't get the others to believe... and then they do.

And then there's Thomas. The doubter.

These back-and-forth tales persist throughout Christian history.

Perhaps Thomas can give US comfort when we struggle with what we believe...

WHO we believe in!

Thomas said, (remember?) *“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.”*

Now, there’s no record in the Bible of what the others said.

The disciples sure couldn’t claim the high ground; they’d scoffed, too.

So, when Jesus appears AGAIN, and **they ALL can** see his hands and his side, the rejoicing begins!

What is it about proof?

Why do these disciples, the closest to Jesus, who walked with him, and ate with him, listened to him – require something more in order to believe?

What does it take to tip the scale?

I have a friend who trains dogs for agility competitions.

Ever seen one?

The dogs run an obstacle course that includes a teeter totter.

The dog is supposed to run up one side, carefully balance to step past the center point, and tip the board down on the other side.

Usually, the dogs doesn’t walk or even to run off the board.

They just *jump* off in their excitement.

Faith is much like that teeter totter.

There’s balancing.

We run up one side of consideration to the tipping point where we could stay balanced on our comfortable side.

We might even stand in the middle if we’re very careful.

And we could jump, with all we’ve got, to the other side, where there MIGHT be the downside of the plank, or thin air.

Perhaps that’s where we get the expression “takin’ a leap of faith,” because that’s exactly what it is.

Most often, when we get to that tipping point of faith, there’s only spiritual “thin air” on the other side.

It's much safer, WE THINK, to stay on the uphill side with "solid" under us.

It's more uncertain, scarier even, to have to scramble to keep our footing and balance like the dogs on the obstacle course, before we decide to *jump!*

The threshold of the empty tomb of Easter morning is that tipping point, the place of decision.

Between the ends of the teeter totter, at that "place" is the threshold of the tomb.

It's the door.

But is it a *way in?*

*Or a way out?*

Do we stay in safety and low risk?

Or do we leap into God's work?

In his collection of essays "A Grief Observed," C.S. Lewis wrote:

*"You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It's easy to say you believe a rope to be strong...as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose that you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?"*

Such is faith.

What does it take for us to believe?

We all practice religion; we show up here on Sundays. We practice our disciplines of prayer and worship.

But, even when we call ourselves Christian, we're not necessarily converted to faith.

These days we hear about differences in churches; different views about "is it wine or grape juice for communion? Should we have candles on the altar, or should there be an altar at all?

Those are the things of religion, but too often they are "things" that get in the way of being a believer in a Christian community.

Jesus wasn't so much concerned about matters of religion as much as matters of faith.

Think about the stories of Jesus, his ministry, his interactions with people.

Too often we recall religious leaders criticizing Jesus for eating unwashed food with unwashed people!

And do you remember his usual response?

He'd say that those THINGS were not what was important; they weren't things of the Kingdom of God.

As we begin this 50-day season of Eastertide, we're going to hear stories, not of religion, but of faith and believing.

Like we've started with today:

- standing at the entrance to the tomb, and deciding whether to go in.

Of being locked in the house with the disciples and seeing the Lord.

Of the women, (who seem to be the only ones who believe without question or denial.)

Of Peter and the other disciples.

Of Thomas, "Doubting Thomas", who wanted to see and touch.

I have sympathy for Thomas.

Shucks, Mary didn't "believe" until Jesus spoke her name (like you heard from choir's anthem earlier.)

Many of us, (all of us?) have had points in our lives where we've struggled, like Thomas struggled.

Maybe we're not supposed to "get it" **until** Jesus calls us like he did Mary.

I think we can take heart that Jesus understood that there would be doubts among his followers.

So, he spoke to Mary.

He came into that room to take away ALL the disciples' doubt.

He understood that there would be doubts, from the first day's sunrise, until He comes again.

He understood, Dear Ones, so we can stop “teetering” with struggles of faith, which aren’t failures; I see them as opportunities to seek Jesus and to look for signs of him every day.

We can use this Easter season to grow in knowing the Risen Christ in a new way. Why not be, like Mary in the Garden, seeking and searching for Him in people and places and opportunities every day. We just have to seek Him.

What opportunity is Jesus calling you to?

Is it to spread the Gospel?

To reach out to those in need or to breathe life into something that is failing?

Are you an encourager?

A forgiver?

Someone who loves?

Are you being called to try something you’ve never done before?

I think the Resurrection, that we live as Easter people, IS a building experience for this Family of faith.

That we can be drawn into community AND GROWN out of this community as we share our faith in profound ways: sharing hospitality and meals so that no one goes hungry (physically or spiritually); sharing in practical ways, in worship and prayer for one another.

I think the unity that comes from our shared experience is, that, BY FAITH, we know Jesus IS THE RISEN LORD,

That taking, with seriousness the Maundy Mandate to love one another, ‘cause that will make such an impact that others will seek to know what we know.

How will WE put ourselves into the Resurrection story?

We’re standing on the threshold of the tomb.

We’ve heard the testimony of the women.

We know what the disciples know.

What is your response to the Easter Good News?

**CHRIST IS RISEN? HE IS RISEN INDEED.**

**Amen**