



# SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Sermon for Sunday, April 8, 2018

*The Second Sunday of Easter*

FR. CHARLES WITKE

Acts 4:32-35 | Psalm 133 | 1 John 1:1-2:2 | John 20:19-31

It must have been something important that kept Thomas away from the others barricaded in hiding that Sunday after Jesus' execution. As a result, he missed the great excitement: Jesus was resurrected, had returned to his followers, and had work for them to continue doing. Thomas missed the great commissioning, the sending forth of his followers to continue his work of forgiveness to a broken world. When told, he said he would not believe until he could prove for himself this had happened. And thus he gained the unfortunate title of Doubting Thomas. But because of his doubt, which perhaps we should call caution, we have a wonderful story of faith.

Doubt actually isn't the opposite of faith. Our modern world in so many ways suggests that the true opposite of faith is indifference. Doubt, the kind of doubt Thomas shows us when turns up too late to see Jesus, actually keeps faith alive and moving along. It's really too bad that to some he is still known as Doubting Thomas; all along in John's Gospel and elsewhere he is Jesus' loyal follower, a true believer in him whom he follows faithfully to the end. In today's Gospel he is not refusing or postponing belief; he like the other Apostles wanted to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, but did not dare to: it was too wonderful. He needed further evidence for himself. And because of his consistency of belief, loyalty and goodwill, when Jesus reappears, a week later after his Resurrection, Jesus gives him a sign.

But that sign, the wounds that Thomas and the others knew so well, did not create faith in Thomas. It releases the faith that was in him already thanks to Jesus. It was crucial and important for Thomas to know Jesus this way for himself. Thomas knows exactly what are the identifying marks of Jesus; he knows what he is looking for, and he sees it. And it is important for us to know Jesus this way too: not just as a teacher, but as wounded and painfully put to death on his cross. He not only knows our pain; he is one with us in pain and suffering and grief.

When the Apostles, minus Thomas, have their experience of the Risen Lord that first Sunday, and when he comes late and they tell him about it, it is significant that they don't talk about faith or belief; they do not say we believe Jesus is risen from the dead, or we have faith in the Risen Lord; they only

say "We have seen the Lord." They have experienced Jesus again after the Resurrection. Whatever doubt Thomas may harbor because he wasn't there with them earlier to see him, he is now moved to want to share in their experience. It has clearly been that powerful. And we are here this morning because we as well want to share in that experience, wonder and joy.

Thomas, for whom doubt is not defeat, but an impetus to faith, is really on our wavelength: his questions do not evade or obscure the truth, but reveal it. For Thomas, Jesus can never be only an idea, a leader of a movement, much less an impractical ideal in the real world. He can be only his kind of Jesus: wounded, murdered, and now risen. Thomas, and all of John's Gospel story, isn't about hopeful attitudes, spiritualized explanations, and optimistic claims, but about a wounded, executed healer now alive, fully human and fully God, as Thomas says: "My Lord and my God!"

And this Jesus was and remains in solidarity with humans everywhere in our broken and suffering world, where so many are increasingly afflicted with neglect and violence. And this Jesus has work for us to do to help. St John's Gospel gives this account of Thomas not to condemn his questions, but to show us that this historical Jesus, condemned, executed and risen, is the only kind of Jesus we too have got.

When we say the Creed this morning, we are like Thomas in what we do: when we say we believe all those statements of the Creed, as we leap over chasms like the Resurrection without looking down too much, the object of our belief is not merely the words of the statement but a Person: God: whom we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Thomas says "My Lord and my God" he too speaks of a Person, Jesus, and of his relationship with that Person. And so we too become part of the Resurrection story in our own ways; we hear the words imparting peace, and the words sending us out to continue the work of Jesus. We are sent out every Sunday from this place into the world like those disciples a week after Easter in the Gospel story this morning: we are sent out so that others might see him; so others might know him as Thomas knew him; so others might know him as we know him ourselves. May our relationship with our risen Lord go forward to do the work he has given us to do in his name. Amen.