

Easter 2
May 1, 2011
Text: John 20:19-21
Theme: "Of" not "After" Easter

There are things in this life that I think are important and everyone else rolls their eyes. I know. But today I am going to hold forth on another of my little oddities because I think it is important. Today is the second Sunday "OF" Easter not the second Sunday "AFTER" Easter. Why does it matter? Well, I'm glad you asked!

Look at our Gospel for today – the famous story of doubting Thomas. We are too kind to Thomas. He was not doubting. He was Unbeliever Thomas. Doubting is saying, I believe in Jesus but sometimes I wonder if he is really involved in my day to day life. Thomas did not believe that he had risen from the dead and so Thomas also did not believe that he was the son of God. For Thomas, Easter was over, Jesus was dead and now it's time to move on with life.

Sadly, a great many Christians act just like Thomas. The church is packed for Palm Sunday and Easter and then we retire into summer. See you in the fall for Rally Day. Jesus is not just an historic figure whom we are celebrating. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Casimir Pulaski and Martin Luther King Jr. all came and went. They were on this earth. They did some good stuff and then they died and we celebrate their births by taking a day off from work. The difference is, Jesus came back and began a whole new world. His resurrection means that you and I are immortal. His resurrection means that nothing in this world is all that significant except our work of telling people what he has done. All of the people whose birthdays we celebrate did a little slice of good in a little slice of time. Jesus changed the whole world.

That is why we have 7 Sundays “of” Easter and not 7 Sundays “after” Easter. We celebrate a week of Easters and beyond that, every Sunday is a little Easter to remind us that Jesus rose from the dead. Our 49 days of Easter is a billboard in the face of the unbelieving Thomas lurking within all of us who want to minimize this nonsense and get on with “real life”.

Easter is not just a particular time period either. Easter is that moment in which Jesus shows up in our lives in an amazing way and changes our whole direction. For Thomas, he came walking through the walls in that upper room and said, “Here ya go Thomas. Put your fingers right there and see if you believe that it is me!” Thomas answered unthinkingly but appropriately, “My Lord and my God!” It apparently changed his life, that moment in the upper room with Jesus, because Thomas went on to spend the rest of his life proclaiming the Gospel in India until he was stoned to death around 72 AD by unbelievers who were afraid that he was going to disrupt their social system. And he would have too because the Gospel frees us from human traditions and social castes. The Gospel says; because Jesus was raised from the dead, we are bound by nothing on this earth and we are free to live our lives in his light. There is no fate, or chance or karma, only Christ.

I have known other people who had one of those Easter miracles in their lives. One person was miraculously healed from a difficult cancer. At first, he confessed, “My Lord and My God!” and became a devout Christian. But eventually, he got used to being well again and life just sort of took over. As Harry Chapin so aptly put it, “there were planes to catch and bills to pay.” Soon he was no longer in worship, no longer in Bible Study and church was something you did three or four times a year

because after all, that's what decent people do right? That's how it is with all of us. Life takes over and we find ourselves wandering.

I call and visit people who have not been in church for a while and I never hear them say, "What? I'm supposed to be there every week? Well I never knew that! No one told me that it was a weekly thing." I always hear, "Yeah, I know Pastor, I should be at church but I had to work a couple weekends and then we were at our vacation place for a couple weeks and then Junior had a tournament he was in and then our pet Salamander died and..." Well, so it goes. Life gets in the way if you let it.

That is why we celebrate Easter for 49 days now and then every Sunday after that. The resurrection is the most significant event of your life period. But it is impossible to believe. Our human brains can't wrap around it and it takes very little for us to start disbelieving it. That's why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and gave us faith. We need faith to believe that which is totally out of our realm of understanding. God's Word and His Holy Sacraments strengthen our faith and empower us to confess with Thomas, "My Lord and My God!" If our faith gets weak, our belief loosens and eventually falls away.

Jesus has shown up in your life again today. He is here in his Word. He is here in the waters of your Baptism. He is here on the altar in the Bread and the Wine which is his Body and Blood. Which is it? Move on with life as you know it and ignore Jesus because it is too unbelievable – too ridiculous that anyone would love you so much that he died and was damned to change your world? Or drop everything, grab onto Jesus, let him change your life as you confess MY LORD AND MY GOD!?"