

Second Sunday of Easter + April 27, 2025
Indiana-Kentucky Synod Sermon and Prayers
Pr. Dan Forehand, Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

O God of life, you reach out to us amid our fears with the wounded hands of your risen Son. By your Spirit's breath revive our faith in your mercy, and strengthen us to be the body of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, 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."

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), 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."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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Sermon by Pastor Dan Forehand

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.
Amen.

Alleluia! Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is good to gather today as we continue our celebration of Easter. We are reminded that Easter is not a day, but it is, in the life of the Church a season. And, for the life of a Christian, Easter is a way of life. And so this day, we continue our celebration of the Good News that the grave could not hold Jesus, but that he rose from the dead, just as he said he would.

For me, this reading from John's gospel has always been one of my favorites, because I can absolutely relate to Thomas and the disciples in ways that I probably cannot from the Easter Sunday reading of last week. These complex characters from the story are challenging for me to relate to.

Last week, we had Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who faithfully headed to the tomb early in the morning, believing that a miracle would happen. I'd like to believe that I would have the faith of these amazing women and show up that morning, but when I'm really honest with myself – I don't know if I would.

Then there's the angel who rolls the stone away and tells the women not to be afraid. For those who know me, you know that I'm not the angel-type. So I can't relate to that character either.

And then there's Jesus. Nope. Not me.

But this week's story, I can totally relate to just about everyone in the story. And maybe you can too. We have the disciples who are locked in the place where they are staying out of fear. Fear that what happened to Jesus might happen to them, too. Fear that they are not certain of what will come next for them after their lives have been upended. A general fear of the future. Are you ever afraid of the future? I know I am.

And even after Jesus greets them, says, "Peace be with you," and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, they still are locked in this place a week later. Again, I don't know about you, but I think that I can relate to that sense of fear. Even knowing that Jesus is with me. Even knowing that Jesus has given the Church everything we need to live as the resurrected people of God. Even with all that – I, we, still sometimes just want to lock ourselves in our homes, in our churches, because it just feels safer.

And then, there's Thomas. I always wonder what it was that Thomas was doing while the rest of his friends were hiding away. In my faithful imagination, he was actually the disciple who maybe believed that there was something good to come and he wanted to go and see what God was up to. Or, he continued to follow Jesus' commands and was out doing the work of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, setting free those who are oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. But wherever he is, he misses the encounter with the resurrected body of Jesus. And so when he comes back, he doesn't believe the others. He needs proof for himself.

Are there times that you struggle to believe? Are there times when the weight of the world, when the struggles of this life, when the complexities all around you make it difficult to believe that this story of resurrection might be true? Do you maybe yearn for more proof? Couldn't those faithful women have taken a selfie or at least painted a picture of the empty tomb and the risen Jesus? Maybe you don't, but I do. I can absolutely relate to Thomas. I want so badly to have an unwavering, unshakeable, unfaltering belief in Jesus, but sometimes I struggle, too.

So between the disciples and Thomas, I find these characters this week far more relatable than the ones from last week. Which makes the way that Jesus interacts with them all the more powerful.

Jesus doesn't come to the disciples in the locked room and say, "You dummies! Why are you locked in here? Why can't you just believe and live the lives I've told you to live?" No. He sees them – he looks at them, at us, with compassion and love, and says, "Peace be with you." In the midst of our fear, in the midst of their uncertainty, in the midst of everything, Jesus comes not with judgment but with peace and grace and love and understanding. And then he gives them, he gives us, a gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit as we strive go and tell the Good News.

And then, Thomas. Jesus again, does not come with judgment, but with compassion. "If you need to touch the wounds, it seems a little gross, but go for it," says Jesus, or something close to that. He says, "I am more than you can comprehend and imagine. My love is broader and more inclusive that you can possibly see. ***I love you.***" Those are the words that Jesus speaks to us in the midst of our uncertainty. Not judgment, but love. Not condemnation, but hope. Not tearing down, but building up. Jesus speaks to each of us, "***I love you.***"

Friends, life is complicated. And there are lots of voices out there that are happy to condemn you, that are eager to tell you that you have no worth, that cannot wait to make you feel terrible. Those voices speak lies. But we worship the One who speaks truth.

We worship the resurrection and the life. We worship the giver of peace. We worship the One who breathes the Spirit upon us. We worship the One who speaks to us in our

doubts, fears, and failures. The One who is willing to come into the locked rooms of our hearts, minds, beliefs, and congregations and speak transformation. We worship Jesus – who loves you and me and all. We worship Jesus – who honors the faithfulness of Joanna, the Marys, and all the other faithful women who went to the tomb on Easter morning, who gathers with the disciples in the locked room, and who is willing to offer to Thomas grace upon grace.

This Easter season, may you embrace the love that Jesus showers upon you and may you have the courage to share it with others. May you turn out the voices that tell you that you are not good enough, that you don't believe enough, that your doubts and fears are wrong, and instead may you cling to the resurrected One. Trusting that the love of God overcomes everything. Jesus is with us!

Alleluia! Jesus is risen. Jesus is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Prayers of Intercession

God of resurrection and new life, we come before you in prayer for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Inspire the church with the breath of your Holy Spirit, that we sing the good news of the resurrection. Inspire deacons and pastors, lay leaders and bishops to boldly proclaim your love for all people. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Preserve the earth as a safe home for all creatures. Restore habitats contaminated by pollution or overuse, strengthen efforts to shape more sustainable communities, and make us mindful of the impacts of our daily lives on the well-being of creation. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Kindle in the nations a spirit of cooperation and mutual care. Raise up creative and courageous leaders committed to shaping just solutions to complex challenges in our local and global communities, today we especially for our siblings who mourn the death of Pope Francis and await the election of a new pope. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Embrace all who carry wounds, that they might know your compassion. Draw near to those with chronic pain or anxiety, and all for whom death is near. Comfort individuals and communities suffering in any way especially those we name before you now, both silently and aloud.... Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Transform our fear into curiosity and love, especially across differences in race, religion, sexuality, gender identity, and economic situation. Unravel stereotypes that lead to discrimination, and destroy oppressive systems that marginalize vulnerable communities. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We remember the faithful departed from all times and places. Confident that you are the Alpha and Omega, we pray for your wisdom and guidance until our earthly pilgrimage is complete. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We commend these and all our prayers to you, O God, trusting that you are always with us; in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Savior.

Amen.

Hear us now, gracious God, as we pray the words that Jesus has taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

The triune God,
who was, who is, and who is to come,
Sovereign, ✠ Savior, and Spirit,
light your way with resurrection dawn,
now and always.

Amen.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Go in peace. In Christ you are made new. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Liturgy from sundaysandseasons.com.

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