

**Sermon
Year B
Second Sunday in Easter
To Be Saint Thomas**

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

The Resurrected Christ comes to us as he came to the disciples and that Christ commands us to go out.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

I remember a time in church,
some 14 years ago when our first grandson was visiting us.
He was eight months old at the time.
As most grandfathers do with their first grandchild, I had a hard time taking my eyes off of him.
As I watched him, I could not help but to observe how he took everything in.
He would look.
He would reach out.
He would grab with his so small hands.
He would then put what he grabbed in his mouth.
He would listen.
Caden used all his senses to come to terms with this world that was so new to him.

For Caden, there was no non-belief, there is just taking in everything that he encountered.

He was as an empty vessel for all that he encountered.

Even as the world that the disciples knew had been turned upside down,

they could not absorb what was happening as empty vessels.
All they thought they knew had ended the Friday before on the Cross.

Mary Magdalene came to them: "I have seen the Lord."

But they locked themselves in a room because of fear!

Yet, Christ came to them in the locked room.

But Thomas who was not there on Easter Sunday did not believe.
And he said that he would not believe until he saw the mark of the nails on his
hands and
only if he were to put his hands in his side.

The next week Jesus came again into the same room.
This time, as you all know, Thomas was there.

Jesus approached Thomas' concerns directly.
He said
"See the wounds on my hands,
touch my side"
But Thomas did not need to touch Jesus.
Instead he gave us the most powerful proclamation in Gospels.

"My Lord and My God" [*Pause*]

John says that this story is given to us so that we might believe.
So that our lives can be turned upside down as the disciples were.
But often we are not empty enough to hear.

So how do we believe in this Resurrected Christ,
especially in this time of skepticism and so much hatred?
How do we believe?

We believe through the Grace of God and

because we know that God has given us the Holy Spirit.

Through the baptism that we have received,
we know that the Holy Spirit dwells inside of each of us.
We know that God is Love.
In each one of us,
we have this love for we have the Holy Spirit.

And if the Holy Spirit is in each of us,
than the Holy Spirit and that Love is in all those that we come into contact with.

Let us Look at our neighbor, the person sitting next to us.
Let us Look at that person through the love of the God.
Let us Look at that person that we encounter on the street begging for money.
Let us Look at all of those we encounter.
Let us Look at them through that love that is the Holy Spirit,
that is the Resurrected Christ.

When we view the world through the Love of the God,
we encounter Christ.
We encounter Jesus at unexpected times in those we come into contact with.

Just after 7 pm last Sunday night, Easter Sunday,
a shooting erupted in Patton Park in Birmingham, Alabama.
Approximately, 1,000 people were in the park enjoying Easter Sunday
celebrations including cookouts and Easter egg hunts.

Our youngest son, Nick, a Birmingham police officer,
was called to the park since it is within his precinct.
When he arrived he immediately found a 17-year old boy that was shot in the
arm.
Nick leaned over the boy to assess his injuries.
The boy said,
“I was just here for the Easter egg hunt.”

One woman was killed, four children and one adult received gun shot wounds.

A little later, Nick was on his way to the UAB hospital to follow up with the some of those that had received gun shot wounds.

On the way,
the dispatcher told him to immediately see about a young man that had obtained private transportation to the hospital.

“He has received a gunshot to his hip.

He maybe one of the perpetrators.

He is a gang member and is 21-years old.

He is causing a disturbance!

Nick lit up his lights and siren.

Nick got to the room.

The hospital chaplain and a detective were coming out.

“We cannot control him.

We cannot stop his yelling.

He wants his phone back.”

Nick goes in and yells at him to stop.

He stopped.

After a few moments he says in a soft voice,

“Can you come over here?”

Nick approaches cautiously.

The young man then says,

“Would you hold my hand, I am scared.

They firmly gripped each others hand for 20 minutes until the medical staff came in.

A cop and a gang-banger on Easter Sunday night,
firmly holding hands.

On this Easter Sunday night, the first day of the week,
the Holy Spirit was surely there.

The Lord Jesus Christ does make himself known to us.
He makes himself known to us in many different ways.
In the post resurrection appearances that he made to the disciples that we read about this morning.
In the incredible visions like the one that Paul had on the road to Damascus.
The overwhelming knowing of his presence during a Mass or
on our knees during prayer,
during the singing of a favorite hymn such as "Lift High the Cross",
on a spiritual retreat or
in a conversation with a previously unknown person.

But knowing God,
encountering Jesus Christ is by no means all.
In the Gospel, we heard Jesus say
"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

In that room, he breathed on them.
Jesus then said,
"Receive the Holy Spirit."

And we receive the Holy Spirit.
We receive the Holy Spirit and new life at Baptism.

When we recited the Baptismal Covenant, we are asked:
Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
We respond,

I will, with God's help.
This is not just the disciples saying I will.
We are saying that *we* will do that.
We are saying that *we* will be Evangelical

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons,
loving your neighbor as yourself?
I will with God's help.

We are saying that this will be our mission.
We are saying that we are willing to turn our own world upside down.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity
of every human being?
We will, with God's help.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin a great 20th century missionary has said
"There is not participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the
world.

Titus Presler, an Episcopal priest says
"Christian mission is the activity of sending and
being sent across significant boundaries of human experience
to bear witness in word and deed
to God's action in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.
It involves moving beyond who and where we are.(p.18)

We are saying that our priorities are different from the rest of the world's.
We are saying that we will be a part of all those around us.
That we will love all as we love ourselves.
We will walk with the homeless and the poor that surround us.
We will encounter them as true friends that we love and respect.
We will protect them as they walk in the world;
as they walk down our alleys;
as they walk through life.

The Resurrected Christ comes to us, as he came to his disciples.
Jesus asks us to empty ourselves of all that is really not important.
And he commands us to go out.
To go out into the world as witnesses to the Resurrected Christ.
To bring his love to all.

Soon we will be going out through the doorway of the Church,
after receiving the nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ.
As we leave,
let us go forth into the world,
across all boundaries of human experience,
bearing witness in word and deed to God's action in Christ.

Let us all go out and be Easter People.