

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 15, 2012  
Second Sunday of Easter  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 3:12-26  
Psalm 118:19-24  
I John 5:1-6  
John 20:19-31

We now find ourselves in the season where our service begins each week with the words: *Alleluia! The Lord is risen*, and with the response, *He is risen indeed -- Alleluia!*

We celebrate this reality now not for just a week or two, but for a "week of weeks," or 49 days leading up to Pentecost. It is a time where we contemplate the resurrection of Jesus, and all that God accomplishes through it.

This is wonderful, of course. But as I ponder all that God accomplishes through Jesus' resurrection, I cannot help but think also of all that God does *not* accomplish.

For example, every day I am reminded that we are still trying to climb out of a horrible economic recession that began almost five years ago. Housing foreclosures are still flowing through the system at an alarming rate. People who need work can't find it. Scanning the horizon, it looks as though we may be in for one of the most bitter and contentious presidential elections in many years.

Many of you today came through these doors carrying your own personal tragedies and difficulties, some of which we know about, and others we don't.

And so in this season, and on a day like this, it can sometimes be difficult for our "Alleluias" to ring out in full force. Perhaps it is in God's providence, then, that our Gospel lesson for today includes the story of Thomas.

I've mentioned this before, but it's probably worth saying again that I think Thomas gets a "bad rap" from many of us. I don't think he's a doubter as much as he is a *realist*. That is, he saw Jesus die on the cross with his own eyes. So can you blame him for wanting a real encounter with the risen Lord like the other disciples experienced?

It is the *realism* of this story that strikes me the more that I read it. Realism not just where Thomas is concerned, but realism about how hard it can be to believe at times *for all of us*.

And in fact, if you read through the resurrection stories in all four Gospels, you will discover that Thomas is not alone in his doubt. If you read carefully, you will discover that doubt is not the exception, but the *rule*.

Think about it for a moment. In all of these accounts, no one -- even after all of the predictions about Jesus rising from the dead -- says, "welcome back!"

In spite of all the predictions, no one in these stories says, "we knew it" or "what took you so long?"

No one anticipates Jesus' return, and when he does show up, everyone doubts. *Everyone.*

This got me to thinking about something Del Beukelman said a few years ago after the service when I had preached on this text. Del said that he had come to believe that "doubt was not the opposite of faith, but rather an essential part of faith." Del had probably spent a good deal of time reading these resurrection narratives from the Gospels.

If this is true, then it shapes how I see Jesus' words to Thomas in this encounter. After Jesus reveals himself to Thomas, he says to him: "You believe because you have seen me; blessed are those who have *not* seen and believe anyway."

When I was younger, I always read this and thought that Jesus was rebuking Thomas here. Scolding Thomas for his immaturity. But as I get older, I don't think this is a rebuke. This is not a rebuke of Thomas -- *this is a blessing pronounced on us, on you and me.* It's a blessing spoken to all of those who have come later, and who have believed in Jesus without the benefit of direct personal sight. It is a blessing pronounced on all of those who have managed to come to a faith which lives with doubts, and yet still finds a way to keep on believing.

Jesus' words here are a blessing pronounced on folks who don't need to have it all figured out before coming to church, or helping a neighbor, or caring for

someone in need. And this may be a good thing, because sometimes we may doubt whether the little bit we do to help people really does any good. There are so many people in need. How can the little bit that we do really make a difference?

Of course it does make a difference, but at times we may doubt, because we cannot always see *how*.

But in addition to being people who have doubts, we are also people of faith. We are people marked by the resurrection of Jesus. Our lives are marked not just by doubt, but also by *belief*, belief that compels us to act in the face of uncertainty even when we may not have it all figured out.

Our faith may be fragile at times, but it is a fragile faith that *takes action*, that reaches out to pray, to help, to do what we can. And in the process, we become resurrection people. We become people who reach out, who work for justice, who pray, who care for those in need, and who love one another, all without any guarantees except this promise from Jesus who continues to bless those who keep faith in the midst of their uncertainties. *Blessed are those who have not seen and believe anyway.*

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, I invite you to come with faith, as I always do. But you are also welcome to bring your doubts and fears with you today. As you receive the bread and wine this morning, remember this: *the risen*

*Lord who meets you here is strong enough to bless your faith, bear your doubts,  
and use YOU to make a difference in this world that God loves so much.*

So come and receive gladly the grace he offers you. Then gladly share what you have received with others.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\* With thanks to Dr. David Lose ([WorkingPreacher.org](http://WorkingPreacher.org), April 8, 2012) for many of this sermon's insights.