

Easter 2 A 2020

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

April 19, 2020

John 20:19-31; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Psalm 16:11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

The Second Sunday of Easter is known as Low Sunday. That's because the previous Sunday was usually a "high mass," with full liturgy and all of the bells and whistles. The following Sunday was much plainer. And called a "low mass." You've probably heard the words "high church" and "low church." Easter Sunday was a high mass. And the second Sunday of Easter traditionally was a low mass.

That nickname is used in the English speaking world, partly as a joke about church attendance. A lot of people skip church after Easter Sunday, and after all of the Holy Week services which preceded it.

The old Latin name for this day was *Quasi Modo* or *Quasimodgeniti*. From the old medieval introit. Victor Hugo's hunchback of Notre Dame was abandoned at the church doors on this Sunday, and hence he was name Quasimodo.

But in the Eastern Orthodox churches, this is called Thomas Sunday. Because it is on this Sunday, a week after Easter, that Jesus appeared to Thomas. On Easter Sunday he appeared, but Thomas was away. One week later, Thomas was present in the room when Jesus appeared a second time. And so today's gospel is always read on this Sunday every year in most Christian churches.

It's a very richly layered story, full of themes and ideas. Among those themes is the notion of faith. Thomas does not believe what his peers tell him about Jesus. And so when I was a kid, I learned to call him "Doubting Thomas." But later, Thomas exclaims "My Lord and my God!" So at that point we could call him "Confessing Thomas." Or "Believing Thomas." But at this end of Gospel According to John, Jesus declares a blessing upon you and me. *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*

And that's recorded for our benefit. The Church speaks of the age of the apostles, which means when Peter and John and Andrew walked the earth. They had seen, and had come to believe. When the last apostle died— and traditionally, that was said to be John— then the last real witness to Jesus was gone. And all that was left were those whose belief was second-hand. Those whose belief was not based on direct experience and direct evidence. Those who had *NOT*

seen, and yet had come to believe. The fourth gospel, John, concludes on that truth. That there will be future generations who did not live these things in their own lives, and even so, believe that “*Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing*” have “*life in his name.*”

Our second reading purports to be by the apostle Peter, and it expresses this same kind of truth to a new generation. Peter, of course, knew Jesus personally. The letter states: *Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.* Although you have not seen him, you love him.

The letter called First Peter is written to encourage new Christians during a time of persecutions or troubles. And we read these words this morning: *Even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials.* The letter says that gold is tested by fire. It’s quality is proven in the heat of fire. But our faith, which is more precious than that gold, will ultimately bring praise and glory and honor.

So it’s a promise that trying times test our faith like gold. Only our faith is even better than gold. And the trying times will end and our faith will bring good things. The words used in the reading are “indescribable and glorious joy.”

So I think this Thomas day message: that there are great blessings for those of us who live by faith, who have not seen and yet have come to believe— this Thomas-day message is that in spite of our various trials, which we must suffer for a little while— these trials will enrich our faith, and our faith will become an even greater treasure. Indescribable and glorious joy.

I know how hard it is right now to keep hope. To stay sane. A lot of people I know are isolated right now. A lot of members of our congregation. I’m really not sure which is worse. To be alone and isolated, and suffering from loneliness and an absence of human contact. Or to be cooped up in a house with family that is restless with cabin fever and constantly getting in each other’s way and on each other’s nerves.

I think that those of us who are lonely need the spiritual gift of courage. To not succumb to sadness. And those of who have children swinging from the ceiling or teenagers slamming doors need the spiritual gift of patience. We all need all the fruits of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

We should take heart that we have achieved a victory in Arizona. We have flattened the curve. I know that doesn’t sound like good news, but it is. Not as many people are going to die. Before we started the precautions, we were predicted to have about 1700 deaths by the end of the summer. Now it’s going to be less than 300. If we don’t get too impatient. [*source: covid19.healthdata.org*] The Christian principle is that a sacrifice made in love will give life.

We don’t know how this will end. We don’t know when it will end. The scripture before us

today urges us to keep the faith. Even though we're dealing with holy grace that we have not seen and cannot see, we are blessed if we continue to believe. And Peter's letter claims that our faith will ultimately end in indescribable and glorious joy. I'd settle for a great dinner with friends in a busy, thriving restaurant. But I'll hang on for that indescribable and glorious joy.

The psalm refrain says "In your presence there is fullness of joy." God will not abandon you to the grave, the psalmist says. Nor let you go down into the pit [Psalm 16:10-11].

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Keep the faith The joy will come. Alleluia. Amen.