

He Came Back
Easter 2 (Year A): Acts 2:14a, 22-32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31
Gary Eichelberger – Christ Church Cathedral – April 27, 2014

“A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.”

[Prayer - May I speak to you now in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.]

Sunday ... Monday ... Tuesday ... Wednesday ... Thursday ... Friday ... Saturday ...
Sunday

One week – one week in the life of Thomas – one week passed between testimony and encounter – one week between hearing the Resurrection testimony of his fellow disciples and then actually encountering the Risen Lord. Many of us, I suspect, believe that we live much of our lives in the midst of that space, that week. Perhaps, you believe that you are there now—waiting to encounter—wanting to believe.

Each one of us has had the experience of hearing the Resurrection testimony. Even if it is your first day in church – if you had never heard anything about Jesus before today (which is unlikely if you’ve been in Nashville for any period of time) – but even if it were, you have just heard the reading from Acts where Peter is recorded – just moments after receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost – addressing the crowd and testifying about what has transpired in the world through its encounter with Jesus of Nazareth – who, in his life, did great deeds of power, wonders and signs, who was then crucified and died but was “raised up” ... “freed from death” ... “because it was impossible for him to be held in [death’s] power.” So, if you had not heard before today, you have heard it now.

All of us here are in league with Thomas then in at least two respects– we were, like Thomas, not in the room in Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago when Jesus appeared on Easter Sunday, and we also, like Thomas, have since heard testimony of what happened on that day.

Of course, most of us gathered here have been hearing Resurrection testimony for a long time. Some of us have been hearing it on a regular basis since before we can remember. Many of us gathered together last Saturday night at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday morning and heard it proclaimed and celebrated with great fanfare: “Christ is risen!”

But who amongst us can also – like Thomas – claim to have encountered the Risen Lord? To have the experience of truly encountering Jesus, such that we like Thomas respond, in awe, “My Lord and my God!”

Unlike Thomas, none of us here today were in that room a week later with the disciples, when Jesus came and stood among them again, and Thomas finally believed.

But here we are, like Thomas, one week after Easter Sunday, and, no doubt, many of us can't help but be envious of him. Thomas expressed his doubt, he asked for proof, and he got it.

Thomas had heard the testimony of his fellow disciples – of his closest friends. Those whom he trusted told him that Jesus was alive, but it was not enough. Instead, he responded that he would “not believe” until he could both see and touch the crucified and living body of Jesus.

And, a week later, Jesus stood before him, showed Thomas his wounds, and invited Thomas not only to see but also to touch. And, with his wounds exposed, Jesus implored Thomas, “Do not doubt, but believe.”

“Do not doubt, Thomas, but believe.”

And Thomas believed. He recognized the risen Christ – this man with whom Thomas had walked so many miles from Galilee to Jerusalem – Thomas now recognized the one standing before him bearing the wounds of nails and a spear – Thomas now recognized him as Lord and God.

As a result, Thomas added his voice to those who could testify of their encounter with the Risen Christ. Church tradition holds that Thomas spent the rest of his life as an evangelist – traveling as far as India preaching the Good News and founding new church communities. To this day, many Christians in India see themselves as heirs of Thomas in their faith.

But, I imagine, there are some here today who might be thinking to themselves—well, if Jesus appeared before me right now, I would have faith that would move mountains. If I had that kind of proof, I wouldn't hesitate to go to India or anywhere else in the world – to the ends of the earth – to testify to what I had seen.

Careful.

Because, whether you know it or not, you don't have to wait another week. You don't have to wait another day. You don't even have to wait another hour. You are only moments away from being invited to come forward to kneel around this table—and encounter our Risen Lord once again.

As Saint Cyril of Alexandria wrote in the fifth century:

Christ still visits us and appears to us all, both invisibly as God and visibly in the body. He allows us to touch his holy flesh and gives it to

us. For through the grace of God we are admitted to partake of the blessed Eucharist, receiving Christ into our hands, to the intent that we may firmly believe that he did in truth raise up the temple of his body.

So when you hear the words “The Gifts of God for the People of God” – know that you have just been invited to an encounter with the Risen Christ. You have been invited to take your place with Thomas. Perhaps, you might even ponder Thomas’s words – “My Lord and my God” – as you do so.

And, as many of you are well aware, this table is not the only place where you have the opportunity to encounter the Risen Lord. We encounter him in prayer, in worship, in the Scriptures, in all of the sacraments, and in the community of believers—Christ’s body the Church.

Of course, I understand that some of you may be thinking – I pray, I worship, I kneel before this Table, and I receive the Body and Blood of Christ – but I still don’t feel like my prayer has been answered in the way that Thomas’ prayer was answered.

That may be true.

But Jesus did not answer Thomas’s prayer immediately.

I imagine that the week between testimony and encounter—between the two Sundays. I imagine that it was a long week for Thomas. He did not know that it would only be a week – he had no idea what would happen on the following Sunday. We don’t know why Thomas was not in the room on Easter Sunday when Jesus appeared the first time—but one can imagine that Thomas wished that it were otherwise. Perhaps, he was frustrated about what ever had led to him not being there—perhaps he was frustrated with the other disciples who had seen Jesus in his absence—perhaps he was frustrated with Jesus for appearing when he wasn’t there.

But it is clear that Thomas still wanted to encounter the Risen Christ. Though we can only speculate about all of the things that happened to Thomas in the week that passed between testimony and encounter – we can only guess as to what went through his mind during that time – we know one thing:

He came back. He came back.

And, if you are still waiting to encounter the Risen Christ, I encourage you to keep coming back—not only to this Table—but keep coming back in prayer—keep coming back to the fellowship of believers, keep coming back to his word in the Scriptures. Keep coming back.

And, when you finally realize that you have encountered the Risen Lord, do as Thomas did—share that encounter, share that testimony with those who are still seeking Him—with those who are, like you, coming back with the same hope.

And do all these things “so that [together we] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name.”