

Sermon for 2nd Sunday after Easter, April 7, 2013

John 20:19-31

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

You will be hearing me say that a **number** of times in the next **few** weeks as Easter is **not just a one Sunday** celebration—it is a **whole** season—as a matter of fact the season of Easter lasts until Pentecost. We have **7** Sundays to hear about Jesus' resurrection and all that **God accomplishes** through it.

This first Sunday after Easter has in recent years become known as “**LOW** Sunday”. Possibly that could be because generally **attendance** in church is lower, sometimes the **pastor** takes a week's vacation, and giving is **usually** lower—although; I hope not **much lower** because last week on Easter we had 184 people in attendance and the offering was **not quite \$2,800**— almost **\$2,000 less** than last Easter—granted we did have a **few more** people last year but... That is certainly **rather low** for what is historically one of the **largest giving** Sundays of the year. None the less, here we are in the **first week** after we celebrated **God's mighty power** in our Lord Jesus' **triumphant** resurrection from the dead.

You know what I think? I believe today could be thought of as both “**low**” and “**high**” Sunday. A Sunday of **ups and downs**. Now I suspect that most of us after a holiday or time of celebration and anticipation do feel a sense of sort of a **letdown or a low** after the event occurs. Like when we **celebrate** Christmas—the baby Jesus is been highly anticipated all during of **Advent**—he is **born**—the wise men **come** to greet him. **Now what**—the story **continues**—**not quite** with the same level of **excitement and anticipation** as before— but it does continue. Or how about this—**Christmas morning** has come—the gifts have all been **bought and wrapped**, the children are **anxiously waiting**, the paper has been **torn off**, the boxes are **opened**, and **now what**—life goes on—but the sense of **excitement and anticipation** is not there any longer, the event happened, but **now what**?

Now what indeed? That is what our **gospel story** for today brings to mind. Let’s **quickly** review the **highs and lows** of the last 3 weeks. Palm Sunday Jesus came **triumphantly** into Jerusalem only to be **crucified** less than 1 week later, last Sunday we **celebrated** Easter and Jesus **overcoming** death and the grave but then his **body was gone** when Mary and the two disciples got there. The disciples **left and returned** to their homes.

Now what for the faithful disciples now that their Lord has **gone** from them? **What is next** for them? We come to this week’s “**low**” for the disciples as they

are **huddled in fear** of the Jews behind closed, locked doors. (Remember this was still the **same evening** that they had gone to the empty tomb.) Jesus **came and stood** among them—what a **high!!!** Do you notice that Jesus **offered** them peace? He **did not condemn** them for running away from him, for **deserting** him in his hour of need—he offered them peace. He **showed** the disciples his hands and his side, they **rejoiced and were glad**. What a **high for them** for sure!!! The risen Lord was **right there** among them. Then again he **offered them peace** and gave them the start of the **church’s mission** in the world—“as the Father has sent me—so I send you.” Then we have **John’s version** of the Pentecost experience—Jesus **breathed on them** and they **received the Holy Spirit**. Oh **what a joy!!** And after that Jesus gives them the **authority**—His authority—to **forgive** sins. Jesus **empowered them** to speak words of **forgiveness and of judgment**, words that would not only be expressions of their **personal emotions** but **declarations** of **divine acts** of God. What a night for the disciples who had been **covering in fear** behind a closed and locked door.

Thomas was **not** with the disciples when Jesus came to be among them. What a **low** for him. He **missed the opportunity** to see Jesus for himself like the rest of them. When he **did** come the other disciples said to him the **same words** that **Mary had said** to Peter and the beloved disciple that very morning, “**We have**

seen the Lord.” But Thomas was a **realist**. He wanted his **own proof**. This is where I believe **our own humanism** comes into play. Wasn’t Thomas’ response a response that **many of us** would have as well? **How many times** has someone told you about something and you said, “I want to **see it** for myself. Or I want to **talk** to that person and **hear the story** with my own ears.” Who can **blame** Thomas for wanting the **same real encounter** with the risen Lord that the rest of them had? After all he knew the **whole story** of how Jesus died even if he **did abandon him** like the rest of them.

John’s gospel is the **only gospel account** where Thomas emerges as a **distinct** personality and his **actions** of that night have **spurred a saying** which I am sure most of us know, “doubting Thomas”. But I am **not sure** that saying is quite true for you see, I **don’t think** that Thomas was **as much of a doubter** as we would like to think. As I said, I feel Thomas was a **realist**. Because you might **also remember** that when Jesus went to raise Lazarus from the dead the disciples thought it would be **certain death for all of them** if they went back to Judea. It was **only Thomas** who said to the rest of them, “Then **let us go** so that **we may die** with him.” That was a **courageous statement** for one who we now call a doubter or think of one with little faith. Possibly as a realist Thomas **faced life head on**; yet, he also wanted **visual confirmation** in this case.

Later on in our gospel story for today when Jesus does appear to the disciples a week later and Thomas **was with them**, Jesus offered them peace once again, it was **then** that Thomas was able to **see and touch** the risen Lord. It was Thomas who **believed and answered** him, **“My Lord and My God!!”** In Thomas’ statement right here we have the **one place** in **all** the gospels where the **divinity** of Jesus and God together is **bluntly and boldly** stated. Thomas makes an earth shattering confession ,the **first great** confession, of the Christian faith!!! He does **not** call Jesus-teacher, Lord, or Messiah. He **equates** Jesus and God as one. These are **certainly not the words** of a doubter. Thomas **does not require** further proof. What a **high** for Thomas!!! This is the **climax** of John’s gospel right here in **Thomas’ recognition** of who Jesus is. **Everything** in John’s gospel story lead to this **very** moment.

Jesus asked the **all important question** of Thomas that applies to **each and every one of us** as well—have you believed because **you have seen**? He goes on to say, **“Blessed are those** who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” There is our **low and high all together** in two sentences. Do you **only believe** when you can **see the truth** or the **reality** of an event or a happening? Or **can you believe** even though you do not see? That my friends is what **faith** is all about.

This last week here at Eden we have had **two funerals/memorial services**. In **both** of those services the families chose a gospel reading from the book of John where, in answer to **Thomas' question** of, "Lord, we do **not know** where you are going, so **how can we know** the way?" Jesus responds, "I am the **way, the truth, and the life**. **No one** comes to the Father **except** through me." That is it for us Christians. That is what belief and faith is all about. It is about **knowing** what is said in baptism is **true**, it is about **knowing** that God will keep His **promises** to us, and it is about **sometimes having doubt** so that when we **do see God's hand** working in our lives we **know with certainty** that God is there **with us and for us**.

The **truth** is that in **all** of our lives there is both the **lows** and the **highs**. The **true** test is whether we are able to meet all the **varieties of experiences** with a **calm** confidence, a **belief**, and a **faith** that can only come from knowing Jesus Christ, the **one and only** Son of God.

So **now what??** John writes, "These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." **Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. All thanks be to God. AMEN.**

