

NORTH MAIN SERMON APRIL 27, 2025

## Second Sunday of Easter

### Luke 24:13-33

#### On the Road to Emmaus

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles<sup>[a]</sup> from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup> He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” <sup>19</sup> “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. <sup>28</sup> As they

approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together.

**Jesus arrives among a group of disciples who are scared for their lives; they have every right to be. They saw their leader crucified and are concerned that they might be next. It is perfectly understandable for them to feel scared, anxious, and nervous—anything but peaceful.**

### **John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my

finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. The Word of God.

In our first reading for today, we need to recognize that many of us need hope in our lives, now more than ever. Easter Sunday brought a new sense of hope to many of us. The grief and pain from the past year can be alleviated a little for each of us when we truly see the hope that God has given us through his Son, Jesus. This is how the Christian faith should feel and look after the hope of the day of resurrection. We have received that Hope in Jesus’s resurrection.

The Gospel text for the Second Sunday of Easter is the same in all three years of the lectionary cycle. John 20:19-31. This Sunday may also be known as divine mercy Sunday and the start of the 50 days of Eastertide. The joy of the Resurrection renews the whole world so completely, it cannot be celebrated in one day. This is one of the most appealing of the resurrection stories because it deals with questions about what Jesus' body was like after the resurrection. It was different. He could walk through

locked doors. But it also was the same. He was recognized by his friends and still carried the wounds from his crucifixion.

When Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem the disciples thought that it would be certain death for all of them. Surprisingly, it was Thomas who said: Then let us go so that we may die with him. It was a courageous statement, yet we don't remember him for that. We also fail to point out that in this story of Thomas' doubt we have the one place in the all the Gospels where the Divinity of Christ is bluntly and unequivocally stated.. My Lord and My God.

Mary had told them on Easter morning.. **“I have seen the Lord,”** and describes her encounter with the living Christ. **And what then do the disciples do? Do they run out into the streets shouting “Alleluia! Christ is risen! No. They don’t know what to make of Mary’s story. They are still frightened of the authorities, fearful for their lives. And so, they gather together that night in a locked room, likely shaken and confused, unsure of what to make of yet one more shocking development in a week that has been full of them. When suddenly, there among them stands Jesus, their friend and teacher, who they had watched be nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb. “Peace be with you” he says. And, like Mary, Jesus gives them instructions. He sends them out to tell the world what they have seen and experienced.**

In the gospel reading, the disciples are gathered together, but their focus is fear and doubt. Only when each one (including Thomas) is willing to testify to the resurrection is the stage set for the “great grace” that flows so freely in the story of a community gathered in one heart and soul.

In John’s Gospel we get to explore the responses of disciples to the message of his resurrection. Although Thomas is often singled out as deficient in belief, his story shares much in

common with the response of the disciples as a whole. The disciples are both believing and disbelieving. The gift of the Holy Spirit enlivens the disciples to continue Jesus' ministry without rendering them perfect believers. When we mention the name of Thomas, there is little question about his doubt. So closely have we associated Thomas with the word doubt, that many use the phrase "Doubting Thomas." In the first three gospels we are told absolutely nothing at all about Thomas. It is in John's Gospel that he emerges as a distinct personality, but even then, there are only 155 words about him.

Surprisingly, it was Thomas who originally said -- Then let us go so that we may die with him. It was a courageous statement, but it is also in the same story that has Thomas making an earth shattering confession of faith. "My Lord, and my God." Not teacher. Not Lord. Not Messiah. But God! It is the only place where Jesus is called God without qualification of any kind. It is uttered with conviction as if Thomas was simply recognizing a fact. And so as we continue this story.. Thomas is missing when the other disciples encounter Jesus. Yet he hears from them the same proclamation they heard from Mary Magdalene: "We have seen the Lord! Like Thomas, the disciples were not immediately transformed by Mary's proclamation of the good news. They remain behind locked doors. Like Thomas, the disciples only respond with joy to Jesus' presence after he shows them his hands and his side. Although "doubting Thomas" gets his reputation from this story, his response of unbelief is not unique, but instead is typical of disciples of Jesus.. Jesus has spoken of a future time when the disciples would "know". Even after his first appearance and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples remain behind locked doors the second week as well. They proclaim the Easter message, "We have seen the Lord!" but their actions do not fully match their understanding. Although the Scripture proclaims "blessed" is the one who has

not seen and yet has believed, this is true of none of Jesus' disciples. Instead, John portrays the disciples as still reaching toward belief in Jesus and not quite understanding what their faith should be. Even Thomas's confession, "My Lord and my God!" does not mark the completion of his faith. His statement is a significant confession, but it is not the end of the story. The pattern is familiar: they initially do not recognize Jesus, but come to understand him. Yet they finish with a question about his identity that they dare not ask even as they know the answer. Although John's language projects a future time in which disciples will understand Jesus, the disciples embody a belief that reaches toward but never quite achieves complete understanding of Jesus and what is expected of later followers of Jesus. After the death of Jesus, a new leader had to be chosen to lead the apostles. They are called to do much more than they are capable of. **They are still afraid..** that *day*, of course, was a day like no other. After the awful reality of Jesus' crucifixion and burial on that Friday, This Sunday we see some strange and unsettling events. "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the authorities" we might expect that the disciples would be celebrating by now because Mary had told them she had seen the lord. Instead, we find them huddled behind locked doors. John says that the doors were locked for *fear of the authorities*. Certainly, they are afraid of the Jewish leaders who were behind the plot to kill Jesus. They are likely afraid for their own lives, afraid of their uncertain futures. They may even be slightly afraid of the fact that they had run to hide after Jesus' death. Jesus, however, will not be stopped by locked doors. He comes right through those locked doors and appears in the midst of his frightened disciples. He comes not to confront his disciples with their failures, but to grant them peace. His greeting, "Peace be with you," the kind of peace the world cannot give. Then Jesus shows

his disciples his hands and his side, so that they can see that it is he, the real, flesh-and-blood, crucified Jesus who is before them. The disciples respond by rejoicing in seeing the Lord, just as Jesus had told them that they would. Again, Jesus speaks a blessing of peace and tells them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. For some reason, Thomas was absent and missed out on this first Sunday evening encounter with the risen Jesus. Although he has gotten a bad rap as "doubting Thomas," he asks for nothing more than the others have already received: to see Jesus, wounds and all. The wonder of this story is that Jesus shows up again one week later to provide exactly what Thomas needs. One week after Jesus appeared to his disciples, they were gathered once again behind locked doors, suggesting that Thomas was not the only one still needing reassurance that Jesus had in fact conquered death. And Thomas responds with the highest confession of anyone in the Gospel: "My Lord and my God. The disciples are sent to continue Jesus' mission of revealing God to the world. *What is so frightening about this story is that After Jesus crucifixion, the disciples were left rudderless.*, but we will see that they will not be left on their own in this daunting task. Three times we see Jesus appear to his followers in these early Easter stories. Three times he encounters them, shows them what they need in order that they might believe, and, in believing, might go out and share the story of their belief with others. Jesus meets each of them exactly where they are. For Mary it is merely being called by name that allows her to believe. For the disciples it is seeing Jesus in their midst. For Thomas it is being invited to touch Jesus' wounds. They each come to know and to believe in the risen Lord in different ways. But in each case, it is an encounter with Jesus that makes the remarkable, utterly confounding story of the resurrection believable. It is the encounter that convinces them that the impossible is indeed possible.

They were present during many of Jesus's miracles and they had seen what Jesus did.. and now Jesus continues to further specify what it means to be sent, to make known the love of God that Jesus himself has made known. As we see from the Scripture reading .. The Twelve Apostles were the disciples of Jesus sent out after Christ's Crucifixion to spread word of the newborn faith. They were instrumental in spreading his teachings and the Christian religion after his death. Even though they were afraid of everything, eventually they performed many wonderful acts among the people. People came and brought the sick and the lame and laid them before the Apostles. Warnings and imprisonment did not deter them. Even when those threats were carried out, they would not be silent. It's still a mystery how they healed, how they had the courage to continue. But, the very birth and incarnation of Jesus are a mystery to us also, rooted in God's love for all of creation. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to the Christian faith yet still a fundamental mystery. How did God bring a dead body back to life? Was Jesus' body the same after resurrection? If so, why didn't Mary or the disciples recognize him when he made his appearance to them. We hear the story of doubting Thomas and think "What a fool he was!" We think that we would never have doubted. We would have recognized him... at least we think we would have. In our Gospel reading today, John describes Jesus' first post resurrection encounter with the disciples. His appearance tells us two things about his resurrected body. First, he appears inside a locked room; that would scare anyone.. second, his "new" body is not like the physical body he had before death. His body bears the wounds of crucifixion; his body is not completely the same. So maybe we would be doubting Thomas's too if Jesus made an appearance today. In any event, we know that the good news is true and we know it deep within our souls. Today is the Second Sunday of Easter ..noted is .. Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house. There are



several other names for this Sunday but one thing is certain in all the names and the Scripture Readings today.. God's love is everlasting. We have new hope because of Jesus' Resurrection. Thomas believes because he sees Jesus. He is our witness that Jesus is really risen.

From readings such as today's Gospel, we also see that in his resurrected body, Jesus seems to be free of physical constraints. He appears to the disciples despite the fact that the doors were locked.

Jesus greets his disciples with the gift of peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Jesus commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Our faith is based on the witness of the Church that has preceded us, beginning with Thomas and the first disciples. Finally, John adds that "Jesus did many other things in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and, through this belief, have life in his name."