

**The Rev. T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
Sunday after Easter
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Now what?

You know that's what the disciples must have been thinking.

They had heard Jesus was no longer dead.

They were freaking out.

Made their way back to the upper room. Locked the door.

Peter had moved that buffet table in front of the door to barricade it to protect them from the Jews.

Bartholomew was partaking of the leftover wine from the Last Supper.

Then Jesus appears. They are ecstatic. He gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas wasn't there.

He doesn't believe yet, not until he sees the wounds for himself.

So I was going to preach on Thomas this morning. Every Associate Rector has at least 2 or 3 Doubting Thomas sermons because we always get to preach on what we call Low Sunday. No one usually comes to church the Sunday after Easter. I actually have 4 Doubting Thomas sermons, 5 if you count the one I've preached twice. 6 if you count the one I combined from sermon number two and three!

But then I found out this week that the Greek word in the gospel of John is not actually 'doubt.' All of my Thomas sermons pretty much went down the drain.

So I went and read Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Oooooo weeee! What a response to the Resurrection of Jesus.

So that's my sermon question for today. How do we give testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus?

Can you imagine what would happen if I stood up and preached about that early church in the book of Acts? In order to be a Christian community there cannot be a need person among us. We all have to sell our land and our houses and put our money together into one pot. And then the leaders of our community will distribute it to anyone who has need. No one will be hungry. No one will suffer if they lose their job? Everyone can eat and be satisfied. No one goes without healthcare. There is enough for everyone.

I wonder what would happen if the Newcomers Committee decided that in order to be a member of St. Margaret's Church you have to get rid of everything. You know Jesus said it often to many people who were overburdened with things. Might be a nice solution to our economic crisis. It would certainly lower many people's anxieties. Might raise some worries too though.

But then again, those people in the early church thought Jesus was coming back soon. They didn't think they were in it for the long haul. Surely it would only be a few months, right? Jesus would be back and

take them all home to their new heavenly dwelling place, the mansion he was now up there preparing for them.

And then a year went by and another year and another. More than 2000 in fact, and the idea of living in Christian community like that one is a little far-fetched. I bet it wouldn't be though if we knew Jesus was coming back on Thursday around 11:30am. We'd get our ducks in a row pretty fast. We'd be happy to combine our bank accounts and help each other out. We'd live completely different lives, wouldn't we, if we knew Jesus' second coming was imminent.

Well, how do we respond to the news that Jesus has been raised from the dead?

Well, like the women that found the tomb empty, we can be paralyzed by our fear and amazement. The young man who was there told them that Jesus had risen and that they should go and tell the disciples. But they freaked out. They were shocked and awed and at first didn't want to shout it from the mountaintops. Perhaps they just whispered.

Or earlier in the gospel of John, we realize that Mary Magdalene's first response is one of consternation, because she concluded that Jesus' corpse was moved to some unknown location (20:2, 13, 15).

Peter's response is quite ambiguous. He sees the immediate evidence (the position of the linen clothes and the face cloth, 20:6-7) but comes to no definitive conclusions.

The response of the Beloved Disciple is to see and believe even without knowing the scriptural prophecy regarding Jesus' resurrection (20:9).

Subsequently, Jesus moves Mary Magdalene to a response of obedient faith in which she carries out Jesus' commission and testifies to the fact that she has seen the Lord (20:17-18).

The Disciples first display fear and lock themselves away in safety.

But Jesus breaks in through their fear though and it turns to unbridled joy.

The Greek construction of 20:25b is a clear "if...then..." condition stated negatively. Essentially, Thomas is saying that *if* the conditions he establishes are not met, *then* he will definitely not believe.

Rather than "doubting Thomas," the text presents "conditional Thomas."

Regardless of how you read the texts we have today, we don't get to establish the terms of Jesus' resurrection. We don't get to say, well if it turns out to be this way, then I will go and believe and tell everyone. We don't get to say, well, if Jesus forgives me and lets me live like I want to, I will believe. We don't get to say, well, if I am healed of this illness, I'll go and tell. That's just not how this whole faith thing works.

We don't get to tell God how we want God to act in our lives. God has acted through Jesus Christ in this world. And we don't get to decide that for God.

All we get the privilege of doing is responding.

The real translation of that word is not doubt. It is more like, "Don't be unbelieving but believing." Jesus' command functions as performative speech. He speaks the proper response into Thomas so that Thomas responds with the ultimate relational confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." (20:28)

“Through the series of responses to the reality of Easter presented in John 20, we discover that believing is neither a matter of physical proofs nor having our conditions met. Likewise, believing is not simply a matter of seeing but transcends seeing.”

“Ultimately, the appropriate response to the reality of Easter involves being transformed by the Word, the Word which in John is Jesus incarnate (1:14), Jesus crucified (20:20, 27), and Jesus, one with the Father (20:28).”

So how have you responded to the Resurrection?
Do you believe? Have your actions shown it?

Why or why not? Give it a try. Do something with your faith this week. Stretch it a little bit. Take some action. Read some more of the book of Acts and see how they started responding in that early community.

Do some outreach. Or give some more money away, or bring in some more canned goods next week. Nurture a relationship or let your expectations of one go. Do something. Respond. Pray. Love. Let some part of your life be resurrected and brought back to new life. Do not be unbelieving, but believe, and then you will be blessed. Amen.