

SERMON, Grace Church, Keswick

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A, April 12, 2026

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

**ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED,  
ALLELUIA!**

The course of world salvation history was forever changed that first Easter when Jesus of Nazareth walked out of his own tomb on the third day after his crucifixion - victorious over Satan, sin and death - and set a new creation in motion.

As Easter season unfolds in the coming weeks, we will be treated to New Testament readings like those today that alternate between the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Christ, and of those he encounters who are forever changed as a result.

These encounters ignite profound faith and transformation not only among those in his inner circle and beyond who saw, heard, touched and ate with him after his resurrection, but also among the blessed many - including us - who have not seen, yet have come to believe that he died and rose for our salvation, too, and for the sins of the whole world.

The first among a series of His post-resurrection appearances begins on the first evening of the day of his resurrection. We know the story well. Locked in fear of the authorities behind the doors of an upper room - where just a few days earlier he had again foretold His death, instituted the first communion, hinted that one of them would betray him, and gave them a new command to love and serve one another – in that very same room three days after crucifixion he now suddenly appears to all but Thomas. He gives them his peace which the world cannot give, breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, and sends them forth to forgive the sins of others.

A week later in the same space the disciple Thomas is finally present as a witness when Jesus appears again and bestows his peace on them once more. Invited to touch his wounds with his hands to dispel all doubt and believe, Thomas declares, “My Lord and my God!” To which Jesus declares, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” In other words, Blessed are we, for in

believing He is the Son of God, we, too, are inheriting an abundant new life from him, both in this world and in the world to come.

While Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, only some of which are written down for our sake, we know less about the particulars of disciples such as Thomas. But it is said that Thomas' missionary work took him all the way to India founding churches in what is the southern region of Kerala, some of which still bear his name – Mar Thoma - and tradition says he died a martyr. That upper room experience reversed his initial skepticism and altogether reshaped his life and purpose.

Yet Thomas isn't the only disciple reported in today's readings who experienced radical change witnessing Jesus' death and resurrection. I think we all remember a disciple of wavering convictions named Peter who argued about who was the greatest among them, who tried to stand between Jesus and the cross, and who denied him repeatedly during his trial, etc.

Yet he, too, came running to the empty tomb based on the women's report. He too, was in the upper room on those two occasions with the other disciples when Jesus appeared. He too, had a quiet conversation with Jesus that was particularly forgiving, who sent him forth to "feed my sheep," and even suggested that the church to come would quite wonderfully be built on a rock that bears the name of the once wobbly Peters of the world.

And sure enough, once Jesus is risen and ascended, we see an altogether new Peter in both our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles and in our second reading from a separate letter attributed to him.

In the book of Acts we see the once deeply confused and waffling Peter - now fully comprehending God's hand at work in the crucifixion and resurrection - addressing a crowd of Israelites. To them he can now speak with newfound conviction about the definite plan and foreknowledge of God who in Christ chose the cross for our sake, and of God who raised him up and freed him from death, because it was impossible for death to hold him in its power.

So Jesus, unlike even Moses before him, says Peter, was not abandoned to eternal corruption of the flesh, but raised up by God to eternal life as the first of many to come. And about Jesus' resurrection Peter adds, "Of that, we are all witnesses."

And then in today's epistle from Peter's letter to the early church we hear him rejoice in all of us who have not seen yet love Jesus Christ. Because in the merciful

and victorious risen Christ we experience the glorious joy that comes of our faith, the assurance of the salvation of our souls. Indeed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we already possess a living hope that we will not perish but have everlasting life, to be fully revealed in the last time. For by Christ's salvific death and resurrection on our behalf, sin and death no longer have the final word over us. Death no longer has dominion over us. It is the risen Christ who reigns!

So this is an altogether different Peter than the one we knew in the gospels, and it all turns on the truth he now fully comprehends on the other side of the cross and resurrection.

From those decisive encounters the once fearful fisherman Peter went on to become a courageous church leader, preaching to multitudes, opening the church to Gentiles, miraculously healing, authoring two New Testament letters, serving as bishop, and martyred in Rome.

Martyrdom, as we know, was common among the first disciples (and other Christians in the early centuries). Would they have persevered – especially the first generation of closest disciples - in everything including martyrdom if resurrection were a lie?

You may remember Chuck Colson, a central figure in the Watergate scandal, who famously argued that the disciples' conviction alone regarding the resurrection proved its truth. He noted that 12 powerful men in the Nixon administration couldn't maintain a lie for 3 weeks, whereas 12 powerless apostles sustained their witness of the resurrection under persecution for 40 years. The apostles endured torture, imprisonment, and martyrdom and would not have sacrificed their lives for a lie, he said.

Again, this conviction and lifelong commitment – this ability to cast away all **fear** - is based on the **truth** of Christ crucified and risen, which was not for Peter and Thomas and the disciples only, but a truth absolutely necessary for the salvation of the whole world. So everything ultimately hinges on this reality, not only for them but for all of us who have not seen as the first generation did yet still believe and inherit the same promise.

That's why ever since that first resurrection Sunday when Jesus appeared in the upper room, Christians have gathered each Sunday to celebrate the Good News of what God in Christ has done for us. We know we must still struggle and suffer at times, but we are not without hope as we once were.

What would we give to cast away all fear as they did? What more could we possibly ask than what we have already received? It therefore comes down to putting our whole faith and trust in Jesus Christ, who alone has done what had be done to guarantee the salvation of our souls and eternal life. Because of Him a time will come in the world beyond our graves, when all the tombs will be opened and we, too, will walk out at the call of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, as we prepare to come to the Table that represents his sacrifice for our salvation, and receive his assurance that even now he dwells in us and we in him, hear these words from St. Chrysostom preached around the year 500, and know beyond any lingering doubt or fear that **you are being made new**, you are part of his new creation. So...

Let all partake of the banquet of faith!

Let all partake of the riches of goodness!

Let none lament his poverty, for the Kingdom is manifested for all!

Let none bewail his transgressions, for pardon has dawned from the tomb!

Let none fear death, for the death of the Savior has set us free!

He has quenched death, who was subdued by it!

He has despoiled Hell, who descended into Hell!

Hell was embittered when it tasted of his good flesh...

It was embittered, for it was rendered void!

It was embittered, for it was mocked!

It was embittered, for it was slain!

It was embittered, for it was despoiled!

It was embittered, for it was fettered!

It received a body, and it encountered God!

It received earth, and came face to face with Heaven!

O Death, where is thy sting! O Hell, where is thy victory!

Christ is risen and thou art cast down!

Christ is risen and the demons have fallen!

Christ is risen and the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen and life is made free!

Christ is risen and there are none dead in the tomb!

For Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep! To him be glory and dominion from ages to ages!

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