

Did You Miss Easter?

Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2010

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How many of you were here last week on Easter Sunday? A show of hands, please. WOW, look at that! The ushers informed me that we had over 200 hundred people at the two services. Impressive.

Don't get me wrong: I didn't ask you to raise your hands so that we could single out those who *weren't* here... on *EASTER* Sunday! I was just curious how many of you were here on Easter... at least *physically* present.

As crazy as Easter can be – with family members gathering, and trying to find the right outfit with all of the perfect accessories, and getting up extra early to make the sunrise service, and making the big meal – I often wonder... are we really here on Easter? Were your thoughts fully focused on the resurrection of Jesus, or, since the service was running long, did you find yourself thinking about that meal in the oven at home, and wondering if it would be burned to a crisp by the time you got out of here?

Our two services on Easter morning were completely different. As I led the first service, I always caught myself thinking about the second service, and which things I would have to do differently. Sure, I was here, physically. But my mind, at times, was anywhere but in the present moment.

How many of us can truly say that we were fully here on Easter?

Thomas sure can't. In the gospel today, we find out that Thomas would not have been one of those who raised his hand when asked if he was present to celebrate Christ's resurrection. Picture it. A week has past since the disciples discovered the tomb empty. As Jesus commanded them to do at the Last Supper, the disciples have gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They have barred the door shut because they are afraid that the authorities will find out where they are and will come and arrest them – just like they did with Jesus.

Then, out of no where, the Risen Christ appears before his disciples. Jesus stands right there in the midst of them – as clear as day – and says, "Peace be with you." To make sure his disciples believe that it is truly him, Jesus shows them the nail scars in his hands and his feet. He lifts his shirt to reveal the spear mark in his side. It is the evidence that the disciples need to believe that the man who stands among them is indeed Jesus – the one crucified yet risen from the dead.

Jesus then fills them with courage and inspiration by breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. God's Spirit compels them to unlock the doors they are hiding behind and to go and tell everyone about the good news of the Risen Christ.

It's an unforgettable moment. Unfortunately, the disciple Thomas was not there. He missed out on the opportunity to experience the Risen Christ with his own eyes. So the other disciples run and tell Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" They tell Thomas the whole story of how Jesus appeared before them and showed them his scars. It was really Jesus. He is alive!

As you might expect, Thomas is taken aback. He isn't expecting such news. He *wants* to believe it, but it simply sounds too good to be true. Thomas says, "I won't believe it unless I see it for myself!"

We can relate to that, can we not? This past week, Emma had her four-year-old well visit at the doctor. Parents of young children know all too well it is the dreaded appointment because at this visit children receive not just one, not two, not three, but four immunizations. Shots. Your child becomes a human pin cushion.

Because of my schedule, I was not able to be at the visit, and so Kerri got the joy of taking her. I was worried sick, especially because of Emma's track record of getting every possible side effect from immunizations. After it was all over, Kerri called me and told me Emma did great, and assured me that she was doing just fine. I was relieved, but I had this great desire to see for myself how Emma was doing. It wasn't that I didn't believe Kerri was telling me the truth. I just had to see it for myself.

Thomas surely felt the same way. It wasn't so much that Thomas *didn't* believe what the other disciples were telling him – that they had seen the Risen Christ with their own eyes. Thomas' love for Jesus was just too strong to hear it from someone else. He simply had to experience it for himself. Thomas knew that his heart would continue to grieve until he could personally see Jesus once again to express his love and devotion.

So how does Jesus respond to Thomas' request? Jesus grants his wish. The Bible informs us that Jesus comes back the following week so that Thomas, too, can experience Easter. It is an act of grace. It is an act that reminds us that Jesus will never give up on us. He's always willing to give us a second chance.

So if we were present on Easter Sunday but our minds began to wander... and we checked out what so-and-so was wearing, or thinking about our noon meal, or the second service... the good news for us is that Jesus promises to show up again today. If you were like Thomas, and you were missing-in-action last week, the good news for you is that Jesus promises to show up again today.

The risen Christ made an appearance on Easter, yes, but the gospel today reminds us that Jesus will also come to us this Sunday, and the next, and the week after that. Just like Thomas, we will always be given another chance to have a personal encounter with the Risen Christ. Jesus will continue to find ways to come into our lives – ways that are life-giving and faith-creating – so that we will experience the good news of Easter week after week after week.

If we are honest with ourselves, just like Thomas, we make our own demands of having a personal encounter with Jesus. We don't want to just hear about all of the incredible things that Jesus did on earth 2000 years ago. We want Jesus to personally come into our lives and do incredible things. We want Jesus to breathe on us the same Holy Spirit that he breathed upon his first disciples. We don't just want to *hear* about it. We want to experience it for ourselves, firsthand.

When we confess our sins, we don't just want to hear stories about how Christ forgave other people long ago. NO, we want Christ to say to us, "I forgive you. I died on the cross just for you."

And as we gather around this table, we don't just want to recall how Jesus gathered with his twelve disciples in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday. We expect more than that, don't we? We need Christ to truly come among us this very day and to extend a personal invitation for us to come and dine at his table of mercy and grace. We want to hear with our own ears Jesus say, "This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed *for you*."

We want the real thing, not just some story or representation. We want to know firsthand the forgiveness of sins and the promise of everlasting life that Christ offers us through the bread and wine. Nothing else will fully satisfy us. Nothing else will bring true peace to our hearts.

You and I want the exact same thing Thomas wanted. We want to see and feel Jesus for ourselves. Nothing else will do. The good news is that the Risen Christ offers us exactly what our heart desires: a personal encounter, here in this place. Just as the Risen Christ appeared to Thomas, the Risen Christ comes among us this day and says, "Peace! Peace be with you." And then Christ takes a deep breath and breathes the Holy Spirit upon us.

Then Christ says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Go! Go and tell the world that you have seen me, that I have risen from the dead! Go into your neighborhoods and workplaces and tell everyone, 'We have seen the Lord! He is risen! Come see for yourself.'"

Through Word and Sacrament, through hymns of praise and profession of faith, through handshakes and hugs – in, with, and under so many things – we see and feel our Risen Savior among us.

Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed!** Alleluia!