



## Sermon

# Does Easter Still Move Us?

John 20:19-31 and I John 1:1-4

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April 8, 2018

Skyline Presbyterian Church

Have you ever had a season of deep doubt? A crisis of faith? How did you come to belief again? Or did you?

Jesus says that we are sent no less than God the Father sent him. What does that mean for you? For your community of faith? Where are you supposed to go? What are you to do there?

The fellowship of the One who was raised from the dead looks different from the cultural landscape that surrounds it. Those who have experienced and believed the grave-busting power and love of the Son of God respond with transformed lives. At least this is what happens in the New Testament.

“We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

According to these passages, this second Sunday of Easter ought to be *at least as memorable* as last Sunday: The confession sequence might take some significant time, what with all that honest confessing and generous forgiveness taking place. Not to mention the rush out the door at the end of the service as everyone scrambles to go where Jesus sends them.

Great grace is going to be exhibited all around, so much so that it will spill out into the streets because the ones who followed Jesus have experienced the miracle of His risen presence, right?

If not, why not? This is the question to be gently raised this week. If our experience of Easter hasn't resulted in a revolutionary change in our hearts, lives and community, why not? What are we missing?

Do we need some extra proof, like Thomas? Well, that's fair. I've said it before that I think Thomas gets a raw deal by getting nicknamed "Doubting Thomas." I'm grateful for his honesty. I'd be upset, too, if I had been the only disciple *not present* when Jesus walked through the locked doors, exhaled the Holy Spirit and gave all the others His peace. So, if we're identifying with Thomas this week, then that's a faithful place to be.

We may well need reassurance that Jesus truly lives in a world so utterly awash in death and evil. We may need to ask for some help from our fellow disciples and from God, too. We may need to feel the Spirit's breath on our neck, touch the not-yet-healed wounds of our Savior in order to know for ourselves that the testimony of our friends is indeed true. Jesus doesn't seem to mind making multiple appearances, so it is perfectly reasonable to ask for them. I don't believe Jesus judges our limits. Instead, Jesus honors them, even if we sometimes must wait for that assurance.

Our Risen Lord makes multiple appearances, and the Holy Spirit still blows where it will. Keep gathering with the disciples. Keep asking to touch the wounded side of your Savior. Keep expecting to see, believe and proclaim, "My Lord and my God!" Faith is not a one-and-done experience! It is a lifelong process.

So, if you haven't yet been moved to forgive a deep hurt you suffered or accept that you are forgiven for one you inflicted, or you feel overwhelmed not with peace, but with anxiety, the promise of Jesus to never leave you abandoned remains true.

Maybe your Easter hasn't translated into transformation for other reasons. Maybe you've felt the nudge to let go of that grudge or that worry but you have resisted because somehow those grudges and those possessions and obsessions define you or drive you or make you feel strangely comfortable. Maybe the thought of such radical letting go is more terrifying than holding fast to all the things that keep you up at night. Maybe going where Jesus sends you is outside your frame, outside the plans you have for yourself or the expectations that others have for you.

The ideas of peace, forgiveness, grace, generosity, belief and even radical following are great *in theory*, but inevitably *disruptive in practice*. Dead gods don't demand much. The Living Lord demands our soul, our life, our all.

The thing is, however, that it is in the reluctant following, the emergent believing, the faltering forgiving, the mumbled confessing, the miserly sharing, that the peace of Christ creeps in and the Lord of Love breaches barriers. When He does, we start to feel something strange stirring our hearts, maybe even the Holy Spirit moving us beyond ourselves and into the city.

We're all Thomas, somewhere between *yearning to know* and *finally believing*. We're all hovering between Easter and ordinary time, having glimpsed resurrection but still wondering if it is too good to be true. We're all waffling between forgiveness and resentment, confession and covering up our sin, sharing and hoarding. But living, breathing, took-on-our-sin-and-defeated-death, Jesus walks into all of those in between

spaces, even when we padlock the door. This is the power of God. This is the promise of Jesus Christ. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the relentless truth of Easter, believe it or not.

So, if our pews are sparse this Sunday, the offering quick to count, the music not as grand and swelling as last week, it's all right. The Risen Christ is still in our midst, granting us peace, giving us the Holy Spirit and sending us out to forgive, witness and extend compassion to those who have need—in short, sending us to exhibit the marks of the resurrected Jesus so others can see Him and believe, too.

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This week, I'd like you to re-read John's account. Start with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to meet you and speak to you in your time in the Word:

- Read through John 20:19-31 and make note of the gifts Jesus gives His disciples. How have you experienced those gifts?
- Have you ever had a season of deep doubt? A crisis of faith? How did you come to belief again? Or did you?
- Jesus says that we are sent no less than God the Father sent him. What does that mean for you? For your community of faith? Where are you supposed to go? What are you to do there?
- Forgiveness is a prominent theme in these Easter texts. Why? How do we practice the forgiveness we are called to extend?
- Does our experience of the Risen Christ move us to a radically new lifestyle like it did the early believers? Should it?