

Second Sunday of Easter – 2025

Acts 5:12-32

Revelation 1:4-18

John 20:19-31

The bible is not a white-washed presentation of immaculate men and women who do everything in a magnificently sanctified manner. There are no Mary Poppins types in the Scripture, folks who are practically perfect in every way. Here's an ultra-brief survey of the people we run across in God's Holy Word and their rather common flaws. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife because she was beautiful and he feared for his skin (I'm pretty sure that didn't turn out so well for anybody). In the OT, Joseph was a cocky sort who hacked off his brothers because he was so tone deaf about how his father favored him. Those same brothers, after whom the twelve tribes of Israel are named, beat him up something fierce and left him for dead. King David had a guy killed because David had impregnated the guy's wife. St. Paul, the man who wrote a great deal of the NT, was a ferocious persecutor of Christians, standing guard over the clothing of those who stoned the first martyr. One of the most beloved heroines of the OT was a prostitute. Rahab was her name. She hid two Israelite spies who were investigating Jericho. Peter professed that he would go to jail and death for the Lord and mere hours later he denied that he even knew Him.

Warts; have you ever had a wart? Not super attractive, warts. Does the church have warts? Some church bodies want to project the idea that all of their members are above reproach. That's not really the testimony of salvation history. It's not as though we are interested in parading our shortcomings in front of others, but this is a place where *sinners* congregate. God redeems sinners (that's the only type of person He redeems). God loves sinners. God will use imperfect people to manifest His glory. We are no different. Our human foibles are common. We are common. That is a very good thing to be. God's story is uncommon and we have been brought into that story.

In our Gospel reading, the risen Christ establishes the Office of the Public Ministry. The risen Christ ordains His apostles as pastors, as ambassadors of the Gospel, as ministers of Word and Sacrament. Prior to Jesus invading the room, they were in a panic, fearful of worldly authorities. Their distress was well-founded. Jesus had been brutally tortured. It was a brazen violation of law. It was radically and publicly unjust. And the authorities wouldn't blink at persecuting the followers of Jesus just as severely. The disciples are afraid. It's not a great look, but it is the truth. Then, the Champion of Life comes into their midst. Needing no invitation, needing no *door*, the triumphant King of Easter comes into their panic-stricken room. "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). A new reality is in those words. It is an overarching declaration, extending across time and space. Peace be with you. It is a solid declaration of a hard-fought reality. Peace be with you. Death and resurrection are in those words. And then Jesus shows them the proof, the evidence of peace – the rich wounds in His hands and side. Words and wounds – they are inextricably intertwined. Peace be with you. Peace between God and man, God and sinners. The Lord Christ took all human iniquity into His flesh, into His death. Atonement is peace. Peace be with you. The emotional response is equally rich. The disciples are overjoyed.

This visit has a purpose. “‘As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld’” (John 20:21-23). That event animates the Office of the Holy Ministry. God’s breath is God’s Spirit. The Scriptures are God-breathed. The pastoral office is God-breathed. When Jesus sent out the 72 in the Gospel of Luke, he said to them: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). The pastor is a “mouthpiece,” an instrument to declare the praises of Him who brought us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. A pastor has his share of warts. Sometimes Thomas-sized warts. But when those 72 returned from their mission venture they said this: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17).

Thomas wasn’t there. When Jesus appeared to the disciples on that Easter evening, Thomas wasn’t there. You need to know about this man. When Lazarus fell ill, Jesus delayed going to him, but He would surely go. It was intentional, this delay. Christ’s plans are always intentional. There was danger at Bethany. Bethany was near Jerusalem and that was where some had picked up stones to stone Jesus not long before. The disciples spoke plainly: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” (John 11:8). Jesus was even more direct. “Lazarus has died” (John 11:14). The One who is the resurrection and the life was going to demonstrate exactly who He is at Lazarus’ tomb. The danger was understood and immaterial. This what Thomas said: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

How many of y’all want to be judged based on your worst day? Humanly speaking, how many of you want to carry your worst sins with you wherever you go? Being called “Doubting Thomas,” being known as “Doubting Thomas” – now that’s a scarlet letter. After Good Friday, Thomas’ heart was mangled up in tangled up knots. He had seen the Lord brutally murdered. It was rank mercilessness. Thomas had no doubt cried to God for deliverance for Jesus, and none came. Thomas, like you, is more than just one thing. Warts show themselves at inopportune times. So it was with Thomas. His fellow believers told Thomas the most marvelous news. With their eyes, they had seen the Lord. With their ears, they had heard the resurrected King. Thomas wasn’t there, but the other disciples *told* him. In the face of this wondrous news, news that should have been a joy to him, Thomas was belligerently unbelieving, at least in his words. “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25). That is a blistering statement. It is unvarnished. St. John gives it to us raw. Thomas is laid bare and the listener is invited to consider Thomas.

Christianity deals with real people with real problems and real emotional trauma and a real Savior. Consider Thomas and then consider Jesus. Every plan is intentional. Eight days later the disciples were in the same place and Thomas was there. Again, the doors were locked. Again, Jesus comes right into their midst and makes His solid declaration: “Peace be with you.” It is dramatic. And then, all of His attention is directed to Thomas. It is a crazy blend of sternness and love pouring out of Jesus toward this beleaguered man. A crazy blend of sternness and love to repair Thomas, to rebuild Thomas, to rework Thomas with the certainty of what Christ had done, the certainty of who Jesus is. It is intimate, personal to Thomas alone: “Put

your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it into my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27).

Man believes. Man believes and confesses. The reality which God has accomplished, which He has revealed and conveyed to His people is something we *confess* (Romans 10:9). St. John was building to this confession. St. John had Thomas’ confession in mind when He began to write His Gospel account of the life of Christ. St. John is lifting up Thomas’ confession as the apex of faith, the most spot-on confession that you and I could ever make. What does Thomas say? My Lord and my God! This man with huge warts makes the most sublime confession that is contained in Holy Writ: My Lord and my God!

That’s us. Plain, common folk who know that the crucified King is our Lord and our God. In a million different ways, Thomas’ conflict and then God’s stern but loving resolution is played out in the lives of common yet dearly treasured people. Scripture is our story, an ongoing feast, an ongoing banquet of forgiveness and restoration and a divine interplay between Christ and His church. Jesus, when He spoke to Thomas, was projecting to us, sitting in this place. “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). On the heels of Thomas’ confession, John gives us the reason for His book. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples that are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). My Lord and my God. Tell me that is your confession.