

## Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

Thomas is “the doubter.” How often we have heard him described that way. We tend to forget about Peter, who, while denying Christ, must have felt doubt and anguish. How about the disciples, who said that they did not believe the women’s report of the empty tomb? How about ourselves?

Which of us, at some time, has not said, “Lord, are you really there?” Which parent has not hesitated to place their children entirely in God’s hands?

Jesus did not condemn Thomas and the other doubting apostles. He answered them with His words, love, and companionship during His earthly ministry. After His resurrection and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit as their constant companion and strength. His grace and love to them in spite of their stubborn and recurring doubt is amazing. As the song says, “...how sweet the sound.” Jesus also comes to us and answers our own doubts with His grace and love.

What marks us as his disciples is our response to our doubts and His assurances. We, like Thomas, must cling even more to Jesus. We do this because, in spite of those emotional doubts that sometimes plague us, we know that Jesus is all that He claimed to be. This was the answer for Thomas. After being cited as the “doubter”, he went on (according to tradition) to be a witness in India, where he built a church and was killed because of his faith.

The eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life tell us of their own doubts and failings. They tell us of Jesus and His gift of salvation. They traveled and witnessed throughout their lives. They chose to die rather than deny what they knew to be the truth. Men like John wrote down the good, the bad, and the miraculous for us because they knew how hard it would be for us at times. As John wrote, “...these [things] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

These are hard times for many people—perhaps for you or those you love. In the hard times, doubt tries to creep into our lives. At such times it is no sin to pray to our Savior, “I do believe. Help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)

*Are you asking your friends to join you in Bible study?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

1. When did Jesus’ first post-Easter appearance to His disciples take place? When did His second appearance to them (with Thomas present) take place?
2. With what words did Jesus greet the disciples? What is the significance of this greeting? When is this greeting shared in our worship service?
3. Why did Jesus make a second appearance for Thomas’ sake? What good news does Jesus have for Thomas? How does Thomas respond?

### For Family Reflection

4. Have you ever had doubts about your faith (like Thomas)? When? Jesus came to Thomas to take his doubts away. Who takes our doubts away?
5. Find “The Office of the Keys and Confession” segment of Luther’s Small Catechism. Where in this section do you find Jesus’ words in vs. 22-23? What does it mean for the church to have the “keys”?
6. It’s the Second Sunday of Easter! How many Sunday’s are there in the Easter season? Why does Easter keep going and going?

## The Resurrection of our Lord

Mark 16:1-8

This passage tells us that the women were, "...trembling and astonishment had gripped them...they were afraid." Of the men the Bible says, "...they refused to believe it." Only Peter and John ran to the tomb to see if it could possibly be true.

We want to say, "Come on, you guys! How could you not believe, even after Jesus told you that it would happen?" We think that we, after having experienced the blessing of actually being with Jesus, would have expected the good news, not doubted it.

We would like to believe that of ourselves, but it probably isn't true of us either. We would have doubted it, too. After all, how could the cross have been planned? It seems impossible to believe that Jesus would have willingly died so that we could live—we, who are so undeserving. Why would He die for me? Why would He die for them? How could the plan end with Jesus walking out of the tomb? He who had been definitely dead, living again? Jesus did it all out of a love that we will never really understand until we see Him face to face in Heaven.

The Resurrection is our assurance that everything that Jesus said about Himself, the Father, and the Spirit is true. God's love for us is unreasonable, yet unending. That's a great ending for the Easter story, isn't it? However, as we study God's word, we see that Easter is not the end of the story.

We, like the first disciples, are saved by God's grace through His victory over death. Our faith is assured through His resurrection. With joy and confidence we may tell others about our Lord. The first disciples, along with the apostles, carried the story beyond themselves. We are called by God to do the same.

As you celebrate Easter, remember to move beyond the joyful colors and family fellowship. Thank God for this unbelievable gift by sharing it with others through your words and lives. It is why He leaves us in this world. We are His witnesses.

We are here to tell the world that Jesus was not just a good guy, a good teacher, a godly man caught up in the politics of His time. He was and is more than a prophet—He is the Son of God, risen from the dead, ruler of the universe, coming again to gather believers to His side.

*Let God's Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## The Resurrection of our Lord

Mark 16:1-8

1. Who were the women that went to the tomb? What was their original objective? What surprise awaited them?
2. Why was Peter singled out in the directive of verse 7?
3. Why did the women depart "trembling and bewildered"? (vs. 8) Why didn't they immediately share their experience at the tomb?
4. Compare Mark's Easter account with the story in Matthew 28:1-9; Luke 24:1-10; and John 20:1-9. How are the accounts the same? How are they different? Why are they different?

### For Family Reflection

5. Who was the "young man" (vs. 5) who greeted the women? Why did God send a special messenger? Are there other times God sent a special messenger to earth?
6. Why is the news of Jesus' resurrection important to you? What is this news more important than Easter eggs, family dinner, new clothes or other trimmings associated with the day?

## Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:36-49

Just prior to the events in today's passage, on the day of the Resurrection, two disciples headed out from Jerusalem for Emmaus. During their walk and discussion a stranger joined them. They told the stranger all about Jesus and while eating bread with him, they suddenly realized that this man really was Jesus. He then disappeared from their sight. These two were close to Jesus and knew where to find the other disciples and headed there immediately.

As the two were telling their story, Jesus appeared in the midst of the gathering. In order to reassure them and show that He was not a ghost, Jesus requested and ate a broiled fish.

By these appearances and others, Jesus assured His disciples then, and assures us now, of the basic and absolute doctrine of all Christianity. He was raised from the dead. He was not raised as a spirit, as some believe. He was not a radical caught in the web of Roman intrigue as others suggest. His miracles were not embellishments created by His followers to express their own beliefs. Jesus really said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."

After reassuring His overwhelmed followers, Jesus explained to them the prophecies of the Bible and His teachings. He promised them the power to be His witnesses to the world in which they lived. Far from bringing His mission to an end, Jesus commanded His followers to spread the Gospel to all the world.

They did their job well. Less than twenty-five years later, an angry unbeliever in Thessalonica would complain, "These men *who have upset the world* have come here also." Are you upsetting the world with the love of Jesus and His message of salvation? We can't do it, but Jesus can do it through us. He sent the Holy Spirit to guide us and enable us. As Paul said, "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) As we move out from Easter, it is our calling to spread the news of the empty tomb and the living Savior.

*Let God's Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:36-49

1. Why were the disciples "startled and frightened"? What assurance did Jesus bring?
2. What evidences do we have in this text that Jesus' resurrection was a real physical event? Why was it necessary to prove His physical presence?
3. According to vs. 44-46 what is the purpose of Scripture? What other purposes may people invent for the Bible?
4. According to vs. 47-48 what is to be done with the Good News of Jesus' resurrection? How are you sharing that Good News?

### For Family Reflection

5. Have there been times when Jesus' greeting "Peace be with you" has been especially important to you? (Maybe now is one of those times) How does He bring His peace to you?
6. What proof do we have that Jesus is alive? Read 1 Corinthians 15 and celebrate the reality and power of Jesus' resurrection.

## Palm Sunday

Mark 15:1-47

The crowds welcomed Jesus on Sunday and shouted for His crucifixion on Friday. God's people in the Old Testament worshiped Him on the Sabbath and worshiped Canaanite gods the next day. We worship Jesus on Sunday and turn to other idols on Monday. Why?

Perhaps the answer for all three groups is the same—we seek the wrong messiah. The Jews of Jesus' time wanted a messiah who would drive Rome out of Jerusalem and restore Israel to its former greatness. Even at the Ascension, the apostles asked Jesus, "...is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

God's people of the Old Testament wanted good crops, economic strength and power, so they turned from God to worship the Canaanite fertility gods, who could surely provide better crops than their own God, Who was held in reserve for emergencies.

We, who call Jesus "Lord" on Sunday, seem to treat Jesus as a Messiah to take care of our eternity. For our daily saviors, we seek big houses, investment advisors, bank accounts, fine educations, and strong stock portfolios. And, as we are finding these days, they can make inadequate saviors.

The problem is that we, just like God's people of all ages, forget that He provides for us every day and in every way through His grace, not our cleverness or intelligence. The lordship of Jesus is the only thing that works in all aspects of our lives, not just the eternal. He is our Messiah, our Savior, in all things. He wants to guide our priorities, provide our needs, and grant us wisdom. He wants to enable us to follow His path every day. He asks only that we turn all of life over to His care.

Today, many people are suffering anxiety, depression, and true difficulty—diminished retirement investments, lost jobs, difficult relationships. Some are tragically giving up on everything.

But, God is not a God of giving up. God did not give up on His promise to save us. Jesus did not give up on His journey to the cross. Rather than giving up on us for relying on gods that are failing us miserably, He lifts us up and promises that He will get us through the hard times, providing our needs and guaranteeing that His love for us will not end.

Next Sunday we celebrate Easter—the proof that even knowing our weaknesses and our false messiahs, God's Son died and rose for us, because He, the true Messiah, still wants us as His own.

*Now is the best time to join a Bible study.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Palm Sunday

Mark 15:1-47

1. The text takes us deep into Holy Week. How had the week started? (See Mark 11:1-11) How many chapters of this Gospel are devoted to Jesus' Passion? Why is the coverage of the passion so extensive?
2. Who was Simon of Cyrene? (vs. 21) What was his role? What other "minor" characters are introduced in this chapter?
3. What was the response of the centurion to the crucifixion that he had witnessed? (vs. 38-39) How did he reach that conclusion? What is your response as you see Jesus on the cross?
4. What role had the women served in Jesus' ministry? What role did the women play in the crucifixion scene? (vs. 40ff.) Where will we meet them again?

### For Family Reflection

5. This chapter includes one of Jesus' seven statements while He hung on the cross. (Mark 15:34) Do you remember (or can you find) the other six statements?
6. Read chapter 15 again (as a family if possible). Have each individual offer a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus' passion.