



Most of you know this,

But it is still Easter!

Not that I'm giving you a free pass to
keep eating more chocolate,
because we know
we all should eat more greens,
But you do you.

We know it is still Easter and can hear it's truth
as Whit's benediction from Easter last week
rings in our ears;

he quoted the old Gaither hymn

...because HE lives,

I can face tomorrow...

Simply put, because he lives, we live.

And if we believe in the truth of Easter

then we can agree

that this Sunday

deserves equal

pomp and pizzaz, because this Sunday

is where we find the living out of the gospel Easter tells.

This Easter was certainly different than Easter's past.

Usually, Easter is the day

for all the flowers,

nice clothes,

the deviled eggs.

But this Easter

we appreciated so much more,

our being able to gather,

with our families,

and as a church;
we appreciated
our music,
our peace passing
everything (!) more than we ever have.

So many people told me,
this is the first time
they had been to church in over a year.

The challenge, no matter how long it has been
for us gathered as the church
(*the challenge*) is to live the Easter truth
even as we land here,
a week later after Easter,
living out the resurrection.

Our text this morning
is masterful in getting this point across;
it starts out on the evening of Easter,
and ends up where we are today,
a week later.

Easter morning was full of confusion and joy.
Mary is first to see the risen Christ.
When she sees the Lord,
Jesus tells her to go and tell the others
and we hear the first Easter proclamation,
“I have seen the Lord.” (John 20:18)
Mary is the apostle to the apostles.¹

Presumably she does just that
goes to tell the other disciples
that Jesus had risen,
but they must not believe her
because they have locked
themselves inside all day,
full of fear.

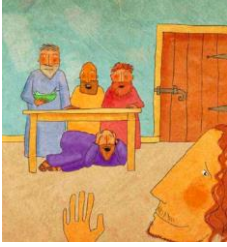
¹ Jamie Clark-Soles, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3222

And then our story picks up again—when it is evening
on that first day.
Imagine sitting all day in fear.

When it is evening
Jesus appears to the disciples.
—and remember for John
this includes
not just 12 men,
but men and women
who had followed and believed in Jesus—
Jesus appears to them Easter evening,
declaring peace.
His appearance, though Mary has told them the good news,
Jesus' sudden appearance among them
frightens them.
And so, to soothe their apprehension
he shows them his scars;
his suffering;
his hands and his side
—signs of crucifixion and death.

They see his body, his wounds
and rejoice that they now, too,
have seen the risen Lord.
The only thing missing is Thomas.

Thomas was not there
when the Lord first appeared.
He declares that he will not believe
unless he sees exactly what the other disciples have just seen
—the wounds, the scars, the body.
Thomas even goes a step further
declaring he wants to touch Jesus.



A whole week passes.
The disciples are gathered together again.
And this time Thomas is there.

Lets' talk about Thomas for a moment.
Thomas gets a good bit of attention in this story
And what Christ says and does for Thomas
He says and does for us as well.

A few years ago, the men from St. Luke's Methodist
presented a living last supper,
at our Maundy Thursday service,
At one point the Thomas character stood up and said,
"I wish people would remember me
for my affirmation more than my doubts."
That hit me—because we do focus on Thomas's doubt
more than his affirmation,
precisely because of this story.

Just a day prior to his trial and crucifixion,
as Jesus headed to Bethany
to raise Lazarus from the dead,
Thomas affirms that going to Bethany
and then onto Jerusalem is dangerous
and perhaps quite deadly,
"Let us also go, that we may die with him," Thomas
proclaims.

Thomas affirms that following this man, this Christ is risky. It isn't all
lilies and jelly beans and hymns.

Today, let's remember Thomas for his affirmations,
more than his doubts.
When Thomas demands

to see Christ as the others claim to have,
Thomas is affirming
that he will believe in a Christ
 that is more than an apparition or ghost,
 he will believe in a Christ
 that knows what suffering, pain and death is
—*I won't believe*
until I see and touch his hands and his side.
Thomas affirms that the only Christ
worth believing in,
is the one who knows our sorrows and pain.
 And yet lives.

It is interesting to me, the timing of all this.
 Early Easter morning jumps to late in the day,
 Easter evening.
What do the disciples do **all day** with Mary's proclamation?
 And then the next question is what did they do
 all week after having seen the risen Lord?



A friend of mine in Alabama said,
 “It is possible that the disciples were like your kids
 —*who were told to do the chores but didn't.*
 So when they hear the garage door open,
 they are scrambling and leaping off the couch
 to look busy
 and get the chores done.”
So in my mind I'm wondering if a week later,
 after a whole week of letting the resurrection sink in,
 I'm wondering if that's

what these disciples looked like
when Jesus appears to them again;
like kids who've just heard
the garage door open
and are scrambling to empty the dishwasher
and clean up the snacks.

What do we look like
after a week of hearing the news of the risen Lord?
Do we look like we've been eating
too many Reese peanut butter eggs?
Are we scrambling to look busy too?

It seems that the function
of the later part of the story,
might be to redeem Thomas
—he was finally there with the disciples,
so, let's tell a story about Jesus appearing again.
And of course, we just treasure
what Jesus says to Thomas,
"Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

So even though we tend to pick up
on the Thomas focus in this text,
Thomas as a character helps us to pick up on something else
in the story.
Jesus, a week later,
is still appearing to the disciples.

That's important;
maybe more so than Thomas's disbelief turned belief.
Technically Christ has not yet ascended
and so, he keeps appearing to the disciples,
he spends days, weeks (!)
displaying the power of life over death.
Let that sink in for a minute.
Maybe that has a function in the story too.

These appearances,
let's us know that Easter

was not only a moment in time
but also an on-going event.

We have a tendency to focus
on this snapshot of Easter
—that it happened one morning
and then we move on.
Many of us go on Spring Break.
Lots of us find a day or two to rest.
But then it is back to normal.
Those are good things.
But do we also go back to a disinterested
complacency?

John tells us

—Jesus did many other signs
in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.
That's the phrase,
that's the clue
that this isn't about a snapshot.
This isn't about
condensing the gospel into seven days
and calling it Holy Week and moving on.



The last line of John's gospel says
"But there are also many things that Jesus did;
if everyone of them were written down,
(John says,) I suppose
that the whole world itself
could not contain the books
that would be written."

Which ironically connects to the first sentence
In the gospel of Mark:
“This is the beginning
of the good news of Jesus Christ,
Son of God.”

Easter isn't about a snapshot
on one morning.
I love Holy Week, I do.
But our downfall has been
that for centuries it has tricked our brains
into celebrating for *only a week*
and not living out the reality
that resurrection means
life over death, *now*.²

Easter isn't just a moment;
there's the empty tomb
—there's old doubting Thomas;
there's Jesus ascending in the clouds.
But that is an Easter snapshot,
not the Easter event.
John's gospel
is telling us something about
the experience of Easter as an event
because the resurrection was for
Jesus' new community **to continue** doing what he did.

All the books in the world
can't contain all the things Jesus did,
is because Easter morning, Easter evening,
Easter a week later,
are just the beginning of the story.

² Information and opinion on John comes for the Deconstructionists Podcast in an interview with Dr. Alexander Shaia <http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/the-deconstructionists-podcast/e/ep-41-dr-alexander-shaia-resurrection-is-49582989>

What John wrote down,
were only in reality
the events that took place
in a particular moment in time.



But even John isn't interested
in the specifics of a moment in time.
It is so much bigger than that.

As we know, having worked through the gospel of John
it doesn't follow the same pattern
of the synoptic gospels,
Matthew, Mark, and Luke—
and John doesn't follow their pattern for a reason.

John's gospel doesn't fit into a Holy Week pattern.

John isn't interested
in the historicity of the resurrection—

John's description
that it took place on the first day of week
is so we will look for the newness
of what now can take place in believers' lives.

John's gospel is interested
in the transformation that happens
when you stop playing Easter as a snapshot
and let Easter be the ongoing event in our lives.

So, John can play around
with what happens,
when it happens

because his telling of the good news
doesn't depend on whether
it happened on Friday
at the beginning of Sabbath
or whether Christ is crucified right now
in massage parlor shootings or
consistent vilifying of our neighbors
because of a difference of opinion.

That's what makes this Sunday perhaps,
just as important as last Sunday.
Because if we aren't willing
to let Easter
be an event and not a snapshot
transform our lives;

if we aren't living out
the Easter experience even a week later;
then last Sunday was nothing more
than pomp and parade,
it was nothing more than the ritual
for the sake of tradition.

John wants us to realize that Easter,
the Resurrection in Christ
isn't a moment that happened years ago
it is a constant happening;
it is believers affirming Christ
every time life overtakes death.

That kind of transformational living
couldn't possibly be contained
in only one telling; in only one book of the story.

All the signs and wonders that point us to Christ?
They aren't written in this book—
because this book was just the beginning;
just the springboard!

You and I,
the church,
are to be the living, breathing, continued sign
of Jesus's transforming,
ongoing Easter event.

Just think of the stories we can tell:
stories of relationships that were broken
but then brought to their knees
in the name of forgiveness.

Stories of babies born
in the midst of death.

Stories of healing when all hope was lost.

Stories of coming back to life after a year
of death and isolation.

Those are our stories.

**Those are the good news
of the ongoing Easter event;**

THE transforming event

of resurrection matters

if on every Sunday

after the empty tomb

if we are willing

to live and affirm

that transformation in our lives.

Let's tied this back to Thomas for a moment,
because his affirmations matter.

Thomas' affirmations show us
that Easter is still going on.

Because a week after Jesus rose,

a week after Easter,

he affirms that this Christ is,

"My Lord and my God!"

He is willing to believe and holds out hope
that he will see Christ;
and that he will see a Christ

who suffered and overcome,
who was scarred but endured,
who knew intimately the devastation of death
and yet showed up in the midst of fear and isolation
 showering the community
 with peace and love.

Thomas empowers us today,
 a week after we celebrate Jesus
 rising from the grave,
 to affirm Christ as
 our Lord and our God!

His affirmation reminds us that Easter
 was both a moment
 and is everlasting.

Thomas reminds us in his affirmations
 That the Lord we give our hearts to,
 will overwhelm us with signs,
 that may not get written in any book
 but are certainly written on our hearts.