

## Second Sunday in Easter

April 12, 2026

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Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Recently I have engaged in the exercise of being a little more public about my church involvement and seminary studies in my day-to-day life and this has resulted in some interesting conversations. For example, in recapping her Easter long weekend activities, a close colleague of mine asked “how do we know that Jesus rose from the dead?” It turns out that at Easter dinner with some other families, her spouse posed this question and with an atheist’s, a couple of flavours of protestants’, and a former Catholic’s input – doesn’t this sound like the start of a bad joke – they determined it was because the tomb was empty. “Is that right?” she asked. “I trust you more than Google now about these things.” God help us.

While I did manage to stumble onto a somewhat satisfying answer, I am struck by the fact that this question “how do we know?” is not only a question we continue to struggle with today (in a post-scientific revolution world). It was obviously something that the Johannine community struggled with and, given that this text is consistently the appointed Gospel reading for the second Sunday of Easter, it seems like this same question is one that has occupied followers of Jesus throughout the years. But is this the right question? Is our objective, like Thomas’s, to “believe?” Are those “who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” more blessed than us who see more of ourselves in Thomas than we’d rather admit?

If you’d indulge me, I would like to read another translation of the Gospel text for you this morning. David Bentley Hart’s New Testament translation attempts to strip away the theological influences and desire for editorial uniformity that is present in many translations of the New Testament’s original Greek and connect us with a ‘rawer’ reading of scripture.

*[Read David Bentley Hart’s Translation of John 20:19-31]*

Notice now that our friend Thomas is struggling with faith not belief. Jesus's invitation to touch his hands and side is an invitation to no longer be faithless (as opposed to doubtful) and to be faithful (as opposed to believing). It is not immediately clear that we arrive at a better place with the issue being one of faith – having trust or confidence in something – as opposed to belief – acceptance of something as true. Here is where the gap between us and the early Johannine community becomes a little more obvious.

Faith (or *pistis* in the original Greek) could mean “argument” or “allegiance.” New Testament Scholars Mitzi Smith and Yung Suk Kim discuss that faith is used in John to mean mental agreement with someone's word or work. It is also used in relation to one's acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, a figure in apocalyptic Judaism. According to verse 30-31, this is of great importance in John's Gospel account. Faith is also used in relation to trust in or following God or Jesus. It is this use that prevails in John. Let's notice or, rather, feel, the action and the movement that is implied here. “Trusting” speaks of ongoing effort and holding fast in times of trial. Here is where Jesus's invitation to “faithfulness” is so powerful.

Faithfulness is an exercise in remaining loyal and steadfast. Indeed, it requires ongoing trust and commitment. In the context of Jesus's teaching, we have a term for this type of faithfulness: discipleship. Jesus is not asking for more or any “belief.” Jesus is asking for knowledge of his teaching and then *following* his teaching. As disciples we become transformed by our trust and live anew in relationship with God, who loves us, and one another, whom we endeavour to love.

This discussion suggests that maybe the question we should be asking is not how we know if Christ is risen but, rather, how we know the risen Christ. In this exercise we are still left with the difficulty of Thomas only having faith after touching Jesus's body. In looking for an answer, let us turn now to the first part of our Gospel reading (verses 19-23). In Jesus's first appearance to the disciples, he sends them out into the world with and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Until

I was in seminary, I underestimated the significance of the Holy Spirit, and the importance Martin Luther placed on her in his theology.

Lutheran theology is Christ-centric. Jesus is our redeemer, and we are justified (or made righteous in our relationship with our neighbour) through Christ, whose Way is our guide. Luther also writes that Jesus is the “mirror of God’s heart.” God’s favour and grace is revealed to us through Christ. According to Luther, we cannot believe or have faith in Jesus by ourselves. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is how we come to know Christ and God. Said differently, the Holy Spirit is what allows us to have *faith* in Christ. The Holy Spirit is what *moves* us in the Christian life.

How does she do this? For Luther, the key is the Word of God and the sacraments, baptism and eucharist. Preaching the Word of God is one way in which we can obtain faith and strengthen our trust. When Christ is preached, Christ is preaching. More importantly for Luther, the sacraments are a way in which our faith is strengthened. To get a sense of how this works I encourage you to engage with the responsive part our communion preface today as a spiritual practice. If we allow for it, we are connected not only to this community gathered today, but to every community gathered today and, importantly, every community that has ever professed to follow the risen Christ’s example. I certainly find that my faith is strengthened by participating in this ritual.

In the Large Catechism, Luther writes that the Holy Spirit “has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God (Christ), which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which the Holy Spirit illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.” In short, The Holy Spirit is the “glue” that is part of our communities and connects us to the risen Christ. In so doing, it is the Holy Spirit that makes us holy.

Perhaps now we can move away from hearing Thomas’s presence in the Gospel as an admonition for lack of belief. Perhaps we can hear it as a call for us to know and faithfully practice the teachings of the risen Christ, through the

work of Holy Spirit. It is a task that we must take up daily knowing that God has given our communities ways to increase our faith so we can do so.

With all this being said, this year, I still feel a bit like Thomas. My classmates and I held our collective breaths as the violence in the middle east escalated. As Iran announced that Ukraine could become a target if it sold counter-drones to Gulf states, we wondered if this would lead to a world war. Further, we raged at the truly incomprehensible support of American evangelicals for a President who could not act any more counter to the teachings of Jesus. Indeed, to use the words of Bishop Larry's Easter message, "it feels more honest to pause in the crucifixion...to notice the world that is unravelling around us. To honour the grief that still lives in our bodies. To admit that this tomb is so close. That we are still learning how to sit in the dark." "Even when the bombs fall far away, our spirits know something sacred has been broken."

Bible commentator Dorothy Lee notes that Jesus's wounds are odd given that his body has been transformed. They are signs of violence brought about by the forces that defy God and the fact they remain is a sign not merely of Jesus's compassion for but solidarity with all those who suffer from violence. What if Thomas, in his desire to live what the other disciples have witnessed, reaches out to the wounds as a way of participating in Jesus's redemptive suffering. Thomas's declaration that Jesus is his "Lord and God," the highest statement of faith in John, comes not after Christ appears to him but after he recognizes God in his shared suffering with all the world.

To once again echo the words of Bishop Larry, perhaps this year we need to reach for Christ's wounds not in search of certainty but rather in search of courage. I pray that perhaps that courage will remind us that the empty tomb is a sign that love always rises again. Not on schedule. Not always in ways we understand but always in service of life. I pray that the courage will move us from our fear behind the locked door. And I pray that when this feels distant, that the Holy Spirit is there to set our hearts burning with the knowledge of Christ. For Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.