



Second Sunday of Easter
16 April 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ.

Amen.

I had hoped for a bit more rest this past week. Holy Week at Ascension really begins about the first week of February as the planning and preparing begins to shape the sights and sounds that will tell us the story of palms, supper, cross, and resurrection. The week begins with the beautiful chaos of Palm Sunday – 4-foot by 8-foot pieces of plywood scattered around the narthex almost waiting for Jesus to arrive with the parade of donkey, disciples, and crowds. After worship the pieces of plywood come alive with the explosions of colorful dyed sawdust. Each year the tradition has grown. More alfombras appear each year. Designs change as Edwin decides and the images of Holy Week come alive before our eyes. Whether you are a child of three or a woman of eighty, there is a place for you at the table of the alfombra. It is a humbling sight to watch plump little fingers and gnarled, beautifully liver spotted hands filter colored sawdust into a design. A small handful of sawdust from one hand and a fist full of sawdust from another combine to create colorful tapestries of the sacred.

Each year I post picture after picture on social media explaining, detailing, celebrating, honoring the tradition brought to us by our Latino sisters and brothers. This year, as holy week was unfolding, a friend and colleague sent me a message. He wrote, “I am obsessed with this tradition. Tell me more about them. How do they get created? I want to do this at my church. Is there a kit I can buy?” I told Edwin - we should probably get a patent and then call Amazon and start selling the kit online. The more holy weeks we celebrate together, the more I am inspired by the stories that unfold as the alfombras come alive. When you come to Palm Sunday and add sawdust of one color or another, I am privileged to know that the drawing on the plywood was created by a high school student while they were on Spring break. I am humbled by our high school student’s faithfulness even in the midst of their own tiredness.

I imagine Thomas is tired. It is Easter night – the women have found the tomb empty and shared the news with the disciples. Mary tells the disciples she has seen Jesus alive – though at first, she thought he was the gardener – until Jesus called her by name. There are rumors that the disciples stole the body. According to Matthew there was an earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone. Mark tells us angels spoke to the women at the tomb. Luke tells us that the angels asked the visiting women, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” And John tells us that after Mary finds the stone rolled away – two disciples run to the empty tomb to see for themselves. Yes, I imagine Thomas was tired – not only from the rumors that had been swirling, but also the execution of his friend and teacher – a burial and a loss of all hope. I imagine some of us know what it feels like to bury all our hope – all of our love – all meaning – into a grave – behind a stone too heavy to roll away under our own strength.

So, when Thomas shows up and the disciples tell him that they have seen the Lord, I can believe that Thomas becomes even more fatigued. Either for the disciples who have added to the rumors or for the complete breaking of your spirit that you have missed what may be your one and only opportunity to see your friend Jesus – risen from the dead. Is it any wonder that Thomas shares these words, “But he said to them,



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"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." This, my friends, is the old story we know so well. Thomas just as easily could have said, "Prove it!"

It is the sign that most of us have prayed for at one time or another. Every-so-often one of us is lucky enough to receive the answered prayer in the form of a sign we believe God has sent to lead us down one road or another. Though I think most of us are left wondering if God has heard our prayer at all. Thomas is in the former category. Lucky enough to be with his friends the next time Jesus shows up. Are you kidding? Who gets a second chance? Obviously, Thomas does. Thomas feels the warped skin of scars where nails and spear once pierced the hands and side of Jesus. And Thomas believes. And God tells a new story in Thomas' life.

Guess who else gets a second chance? A second, and a third, and sometimes a fourth. Jesus never seems to tire of loving us, forgiving us, reminding us, and welcoming us. Even when we believe the prayer goes unanswered. Even when we are suffering in ways we never imagined. Even when all we love has been buried behind a stone too big to roll away by ourselves. God is telling a new story in our lives. There is always a new story of resurrection God is telling in our lives. Whether we are ready to believe it or not.

This year – God did a new thing through Edwin. On the Saturday in-between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, as alfombras were walked on and ruined in remembrance of the crucifixion on Good Friday, Edwin was standing over two pieces of plywood in East Hall. This year, Edwin created an alfombra of a resurrection cross like the one on the floor before us and he created an empty tomb alfombra. He said, "They do not do this in El Salvador. There are no alfombras celebrating the resurrection. But, here, in this country we tell the rest of the story. We do a new thing. We teach about the promise of Easter." Because God is always telling a new story of resurrection in our lives." Thanks be to God. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.