



Second Sunday of Easter
7 April 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The joy of the Monday after Easter for pastors is the gift of a complete day off from any church stuff. Don't get me wrong, I love all of the Holy Week moments. The parade of Palm Sunday and the intimacy of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday followed by the symbolic stripping of the altar. The painful progression of the story, we know so well, on Good Friday and every last word – all seven from the cross. I am there for all of it. Add in the rearranging of the sanctuary, the purchase of the palm plants, the addition of alfombras with Pastor Edwin's arrival, and don't even get me started about the scent of Easter lilies, the music rehearsals, the sounds of timpani and trumpet...all of it lays claim to the most glorious week of the church year. But by late Easter Sunday afternoon, your pastors begin to seek out recliners and lengthy couches to "rest their eyes." And if it is at all possible, at least this pastor, prefers to not set an alarm on that Monday morning following Easter. I do my very best to not leave the house on that Monday, but by Tuesday, all bets are off. And on Tuesday, I ventured out to Pick and Save. I drove into the parking lot around 3:30 to find it full. Cars in every parking spot. I drove up and down the lanes until I saw a woman close her trunk. I made my way from one lane to another and waited for the woman to back out of her parking spot. She backed out, I began to turn my tires but then the attendant lined up twenty or thirty shopping carts and blocked my path. I waited. It is the Tuesday after Easter, I am no hurry. The attendant pushed the line of carts past my spot. Again, I began to turn towards the parking spot, but a man walked next to my car with his grocery cart filled and I waited for him to pass. And then another woman who had pulled into a parking spot farther down, got out of her car, and began to walk past my spot. Still, I waited. As the woman passed, she smiled at me. I smiled back. And as I checked my mirror to turn into my spot, a woman drove up in her car and politely, but quickly, placed her car into my spot. I was so in shock that she stole my spot, that I could do nothing but stare at her as she got out of her car. She caught my eye and waved. I wanted to wave too, with a few less fingers, but I decided to wave with my whole hand and drive on to a new parking spot farther down the lane.

What I love most about Easter, is that for just one day, I am grateful to live in the moment of the resurrection. When possible, everything else, waits. For one day, I choose to live in the joy of the resurrection while doing my best to bolt the door against the world's concerns. As you can imagine, some Easters, it is easier to keep the door locked than others. The first Easter after my mom died, I needed to shout the words: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And I needed to hear you share them in return. This Easter, before the 8:30 service and the first cry of "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I found out that Kathy Hahn would enter hospice care the morning after Easter Sunday. It was news I needed to receive, and the news reminded me that by Easter morning, I am hungry, starving no less, for news of the resurrection.

We need to hear it. We need to be reminded of it. We need to tell others about it. We need to live resurrection with every breath. We need to know resurrection with every fiber of our being. We need to feel resurrection with every beat of our hearts. And yet where are the disciples in this moment?

Behind locked doors. Trying their very best to bolt the door against the world. They are in shock. They do not believe. They are defeated, conflicted, broken. Even Peter who stepped inside the empty tomb is without confidence in his explanation for what he has seen. And if Mary is present, the other disciples still will not believe her witness to the risen Savior.

It will be Jesus. Only Jesus. Who will shock them into the reality of the resurrection. "Jesus came and stood among them," John tells us, "And said, "Peace be with you. After he said this, Jesus showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."



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And then there is Thomas. The one who doubts. The one with the perpetual case of FOMO. F-O-M-O. Fear. Of Missing Out. Except Thomas doesn't even know he has missed out until he returns to be with the disciples. It will take a return visit of our Savior to shock Thomas into belief and a confession of faith, with the words: "my Lord and my God."

I want to believe that my faith is stronger, and far more trusting, than the collective faith of the disciples on that first Easter night and of Thomas a week later. After all, we have the very Word of God – the stories of faith that weave together one chapter to another, from one prophet to another, leading us, pointing us, pushing us towards a star in the night sky and begging us not to leave the story of our Savior at the cross while his body still hangs in the power of death. For too many in this life, in their pain, their grief, their anger, their defeat and despair they leave while Jesus is still on the cross. And too often, believing that their suffering is all that God offers, they walk away before news of the resurrection reaches their ears. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Of course, we already know the end of the story. Not just the empty tomb and the resurrection of our Savior, but the end of the end of the story – the promise of eternal life. How do we know for sure? I have story after story to tell you. Yet we have much to celebrate today, on this Second Sunday of Easter. So, I will leave you with this. Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

I have come to believe that our resurrected Savior reveals himself in the moments we least expect Jesus to be present. It will be Jesus. Only Jesus. Who will shock us into the reality of the resurrection. A few weeks ago, our Monday study groups were watching one of the episodes of the Chosen series. It was the episode where Jesus begins to teach publicly, and while he is teaching and the crowd is pushing in to hear his voice, the roof above Jesus begins to fall in on the people below as four friends tear the roof apart to lower their paralyzed friend down into the house – leaving the paralyzed man at the feet of Jesus. The book of Mark says, that when Jesus sees the faith of the paralyzed man's friends, he forgives the man's sins and heals him. Here I am sitting in a room with 32 others and as I am watching this part of the video, I find myself wiping tears from my face. I did not even know I was weeping. I was so caught by the power of the image – the telling of the story of Jesus healing in a new way – the story of four friends who loved their friend so much they were willing to risk everything to get their friend to Jesus.

I believe, not because I have seen the risen Savior, but because others have shown me the same love that my Savior has shown me with his death on the cross and his promised resurrection. All for me. For us. For all the world. It turns out that I am not overwhelmed in my Fear Of Missing Out. But instead, I am overcome by God's promise of eternal life and the opened gates of heaven that wait for each of us.

What does the psalmist say? Open to me the gates of the righteous; that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.