



Sunday, April 27, 2025
John 20:19-31 (Second Sunday of Easter)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Christ is risen!

The tomb is empty, Christ has been raised from the dead, death has been defeated, love wins, the victory is ours, and nothing on earth will ever be the same again. *Right! Right?*

Welcome to the week *after*. The week *after* excitement. The week *after* triumph. The week *after* Easter lilies, egg hunts, brunches, trumpets, and alleluias. The time when we take an honest look at God's post-resurrection world, and think, "*Now what?*" Or, if we're really bold, "*So what?*"

I don't know about you, but I'm really grateful for the Gospel reading this week, because it reminds me that the grace of God is immersed in a resurrection story that honors these honest and difficult questions. Even though our worship may be filled with glorious Easter hymns, the week after always tends to be a bit messy and complicated. I know I'm not the first person to struggle with it, and I'm sure I won't be the last. In fact, if I'm reading Scripture correctly, then struggle seems to be fundamental to the post-Easter story.

So here are just a couple ways that I think this week's Gospel reflects what real life looks *after* the empty tomb.

First, Jesus appears to his disciples in a body that's resurrected but is still wounded. I've noticed that we tend to put a lot of stock in victory. We value the race won, the mountain scaled, the enemy defeated, the obstacle overcome. It's not that we don't welcome stories of failure, we do – to an extent, but only when those stories are shared when looking back on past events, long after the worst is over. Evil that has surrendered to good? That's a feel-good story. But evil that sticks around? Challenges that won't ease up? A hurt that remains – regardless, if it's physical, psychological, emotional, or relational – we struggle with it...and it makes us uncomfortable.

But Jesus's wounded body reminds me that some hurts are here to stay. Some marks of pain, loss, and suffering leave traces that no amount of goodness or faithfulness will take away.

I know a long list of people who are still struggling with the pain of losing a loved one or one who's sick or dying. People whose employment is at risk. People being bullied or told they are not good enough. People battling an addiction or a mental illness. People whose families are being ripped apart. People battling an eating disorder. People struggling to find value for their life. People who are being discriminated against. The list goes on and on and I'm sure every one of us knows someone dealing with any of these or a million other things. Maybe *you* are one of these people. Some wounds remain, even *after* resurrection.

The fact is, change and growth occur slowly. I've rarely, if ever, experienced instant transformation; the changes that matter most have always seemed to come sideways and unpredictably, often without my conscious understanding or effort. And anyone who's ever battled an addiction, or stuck it out in a challenging relationship, or lived with a chronic illness will attest that genuine change takes a lifetime. Perhaps this is why the earliest Christians referred to their new faith as "The Way." A "way" isn't a destination. It's a road to walk. It's an invitation to a journey.



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Jesus' resurrected body retained its scars. Not old scars. Not neat, faded scars indicating a long-ago battle and victory. But fresh wounds, still raw enough to allow a doubting disciple to place his fingers inside. This hits especially close to home because I'm coming off my own surgery just a few days ago, and I can imagine Jesus wincing when Thomas touched him – that wincing, that pain, that openness was a sign of real life and real presence. It spoke the very words Thomas hungered for the most, *"I am here."* *"I am here with you."* *I am here dwelling in the midst of real struggles."* *"I am here dwelling exactly where you dwell."*

We live in a culture that worships deception. All around us, people package themselves, market themselves, and beat themselves into versions of perfection that strangle their very souls. But if Jesus, even at the top of his resurrection victory, sported his open wounds without shame or apology, then maybe we don't need to worry so much about presenting a glossy presentation. Maybe the best appeal of our Christian faith is in its willingness to embrace real bodies, real scars, and real pain. After all, it's with our bodies that we experience anger, frustration, sadness, trauma, as well as deep satisfaction and joy. It's my chest that hurts when I mourn. It's my face that burns when I'm angry. It's my whole body that gets warm with pleasure when I'm happy. In his resurrection, Jesus honored his bruised, broken, wounded, and disabled body. And he honored the real-life bodies in which *we* live.

No, our wounds aren't pretty, and no, they don't tell the whole story of who we are. But the stories they tell are holy. And if Jesus himself didn't fear the bloody and the broken, then perhaps those of us walking in his footsteps don't need to fear them so much either.

Next, Thomas enters into a community of faith, but he openly expresses his doubts. Let's face it, Thomas often gets a bad rap. Though his story is one of the few in the three-year lectionary cycle that never changes, and we always read about his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the Sunday after Easter – it's often cast in negative terms. He's most famously known as "Doubting Thomas," the cynic, the holdout. His reluctance to accept the witness of his fellow disciples, his insistence on physical proof, his late arrival to the joyous belief of his peers – these are often described as a sign of weak faith.

But weakness isn't at all what I see in Thomas. I see a man who yearned for a living encounter with Jesus. A man who wouldn't settle for someone else's experience of resurrection but stuck around in the hope of having his own. A man who dared to confess uncertainty in the midst of those who were certain. A man who recognized his Lord in woundedness, not in glory.

According to John's Gospel, Thomas had to wait in suspense and uncertainty for a whole week after his friends first told him that they'd seen Jesus. And I wonder what that week must have felt like for the disciple who missed Jesus the first time around? Did he have compassion on his fellow disciples for what they believed they saw, or did he think they were crazy? Or did he fear that he'd missed the memo, missed the boat, missed the glory?



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What catches me most about Thomas's story isn't that he doubted, but that he did it so publicly, without shame or guilt, and that his faith community allowed him to do it. And what I love about Jesus's response is that he met Thomas right where he was, freely offering the disciple the proof of his own wounds and his own pain.

After such an encounter, I can only imagine the tenderness and urgency with which Thomas was able to repeat Jesus' words to other doubters: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" Because in a way isn't this all of us on the Sunday after Easter? Don't we all wrestle with hidden doubts and hidden fears? Don't we all wonder sometimes if the miracle of resurrection will hold out in these post Easter days.

If nothing else, the story of Thomas reassures me that my faith doesn't have to be perfect – because accepting the resurrection, living it out, and sharing it with the world, is really difficult. And it's okay to waver. It's okay to take our time. And it's even okay for us to hope for more.

Wounds and doubts. The encounter between them is what life looks like after the tomb. When Thomas's doubts met Jesus's wounds, new life erupted, faith blossomed, and the community grew. Resurrection and restoration happened all over again. So, during this week *after*, my deepest hope is that the same may be true for each of us. ***Christ is risen! Christ is risen!*** Thanks be to God. Amen.