



Second Sunday of Easter
12 April 2026

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Last Sunday was glorious. I kind of expect that to be the case. No surprise! It is Easter. If the church is going to surprise you, it should be on Easter Sunday! We should sing all the songs. We should hear Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We should gather the best musicians? The organ should make the floor rumble and the hair on your head stand up. The trumpets and timpani, the choir and handbells should fill your heart with the sounds of praise until that sound wells up with such force that you can't help but join the song. The children's sermon should surprise you with laughter. The sermon should inspire you with the good news of the empty tomb. The praise band, from acoustic guitar to violin, from keyboard to violin, should carry you up the mountain to the pinnacle of joy and catch you with such emotion that the very hairs on your arms stand in praise as they partner with your goosebumps. That is Easter. If we expect anything less – we are not doing it right. It is the one day that matters more than all else. Save Good Friday. Jesus cannot rise if Jesus does not die. It is Easter that has the last word not death. It is resurrection that surprises us – not the power of death. No, no, we know the power of death all too well. But resurrection – now that's a surprise that always surprises me.

In the middle of worship last Sunday, after the confetti and pastor filled inflatable egg, when the streamers had finally come to rest on fan and floor, we celebrated communion. Towards the back of the sanctuary, one of our seasoned members came towards the altar. As he made his way to the front to receive the bread something caught my eye on the floor. After I handed him the piece of bread, I watches as he moved to the communion assistant and then to the acolyte – as he walked, his cane had caught a golden streamer. All the way back to his seat, he dragged the golden streamer behind him – completely unaware of the celebratory hitch-hiking. At the end of everything last Sunday, when everyone had left the church, I stood in the back of the sanctuary and surveyed the celebration or the wreckage. A team of people spends hours preparing the space for worship on the Saturday before Easter. At that time, the center doors are still sealed to symbolize the closed tomb, but hours are spent rearranging the space, adding chairs, placing lilies. The banners are hung, the altar is dressed in the paraments of white and gold – the crosses are draped with white fabric, and when we leave on Saturday every detail has been tended as best we can to prepare for the promised resurrection celebration. By the end of Easter worship, the sanctuary looks like it was in the direct path of a tornado. Kind of like Christmas morning with little ones – when the first rays of sunlight shine on a perfect tree, wrapped presents, and peacefulness only to watch the entire scene devolve into chaos. Yet, everything is still shiny and joyful. The same is true here. Gold confetti blankets most of the seating and many of you have carried confetti out the door into the parking lot.

Which is what we need today – or what Thomas needs today. Thomas needs a remnant of the resurrection. He needs a few pieces of gold confetti to help him understand what happened while he was away from the rest of the disciples. It is what we all come to need at one time or another. A remnant of resurrection. A reminder – especially when we come face-to-face with the power of death; the disappointment of days gone wrong; the shattering of the space we thought we had so neatly tied together.

John writes: “But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But Thomas said to them, “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.” Much of the time, we rush to get to what is next. Early on in my ministry, in the days when my wife and I were dating, we celebrated our first Good Friday at the church to which I had been called. I grew up with the tradition of the congregation leaving



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the sanctuary in silence on Good Friday and then gathering on the outside porch – April in California you can do that. We would let the whole congregation come out of the church, disengage the door hydraulics, and slam the doors of the church to symbolize the closing of the tomb. After the doors were closed – we would pray the Lord’s prayer together and then everyone would go to their cars. The pastors, acolytes, and crucifer would stay at the closed doors until the parking lot was empty. So, it sounded like a great idea on my first Good Friday at Trinity. Everything went beautifully – the worship, the weather, people followed directions and exited the church and waited for the doors to be slammed. We prayed the Lord’s Prayer and people began to move to their cars. But imagine my surprise, when my wife, then girlfriend, suddenly opened the door of the tomb and came out behind us. I was shocked. “What are you doing?” I asked. “What?” My wife said. I looked at her and said, “You just came out of the tomb three days too soon!” Always in such a rush, my wife.

Thomas does not rush – he does not know that there is anything to rush to. And when he hears the news, the disciples share. He chooses not to believe them. It is an entire week later when the disciples gather again that Jesus chooses to come and stand among them. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says. And then, as if Thomas is the only one in the room, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Jesus does what Jesus always does. He sees the one in need and shows up. No remnant of resurrection to remind. No breadcrumbs to follow. No whispers to believe. Jesus shows up, resurrected scars and all, to meet Thomas where he is. In his doubt, in his disbelief, in his despair – Jesus shows up. It is our reminder that the resurrection is God’s great surprise – so much so that even the power of death is speechless. And God loves a great surprise.

It is why resurrection is difficult for us to understand, and even harder for us to recognize in this life. Resurrection happens every time we love someone even though they were not very loving to us. Every time we decide to trust and begin again. Every time we refuse to become negative, cynical, or hopeless, we find ourselves surprised to experience the revelation of resurrection in this life. We don’t have to wait for it later. We do not have to rush to it. Resurrection is always possible now. It is why Jesus speaks the words to Martha, after the death of her brother Lazarus. “I am the resurrection and the life.” The resurrection is not Jesus’s private miracle; it’s the new shape of reality. It’s the new shape of the world. Filled with grace. Filled with possibility. Filled with the newness that comes only after the stone has been rolled away. It is God’s great surprise for all of creation. But perhaps hearing those words is not enough for you this day.

What if we practiced the surprise of resurrection, here and now? How? You might ask. Well today is as good a day as any for surprises. Just ask Thomas. After all the chairs came back into the sanctuary – I added a couple of items underneath the chairs. Go ahead, check it out...

Yes, today is a good day for surprises. Not just remnants and whispers and breadcrumbs. Not even envelopes under chairs. Instead, like Thomas, we too can speak both our faith and our doubts, and Jesus will do what Jesus always does. Jesus will show up – resurrected scars and all, to meet us where we are - in moments of joy and valleys of pain – in whatever our need – Jesus will show up. God may not arrive on our timeline, and we may have to depend on a few shiny bars of gold confetti stuck to our shoe or tangled in landscaping as we walk by, but the signs are there. Resurrection revealed in the most unexpected places. Jesus will show up because God loves a great surprise. And what better surprise in this life than to hear the words...Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And know those words to be true, not because someone told you, but because our friend Thomas felt those words with his very own hands. Now that is a great surprise. And God loves a great surprise. Amen.