

St. Luke's - 4-27-2025: Resurrection
Rev. Dr. Vance Mortensen

Lectionary for 2nd Sunday of Easter (Year C)

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Epistle Acts 5:27-32 (NRSV)

27 When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

Psalm 118:14-29 (NRSV)

14 The Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
16 the right hand of the Lord is exalted;
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly."
17 I shall not die, but I shall live
and recount the deeds of the Lord.
18 The Lord has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.
19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
20 This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

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23 This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

27 The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.

29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

New Testament Revelation 1:4-8 (NRSV)

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.
So it is to be. Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

The Gospel John 20:19-31(NRSV)

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the

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disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he 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."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 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."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Beginning of a New Year

How long should a sermon be? Believe me, I read an article that said "The ideal sermon length is 30-50 minutes, which translates to around 3,000-5,000 words. However, the actual length can vary based on factors such as pace of delivery, pauses for emphasis, and congregational culture."

With your permission...

After last week's Easter service and sermon I left with a feeling, an effect on me personally that was: **the Resurrection we have starts a new year.**

When we prepare sermons we usually have a couple of commentaries we look at. One commentary reads, "The texts chosen for the Sunday following Easter converge in their common interest in the way believers respond to the resurrection of Jesus." How do **we** respond...not just those who witnessed the Resurrection?

That's the question for us today. Standing in the afterglow of Easter, but staring straight into the rest of our lives. And the question is: What does it mean to live as Resurrection people? How do we show the world that the tomb is empty and that our faith actually matters on Monday morning?

The Collect for today points the way: "**Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith.**" **SHOW FORTH IN *OUR* LIVES WHAT THEY PROFESS BY THEIR *OUR* FAITH!** That's the heart of it, isn't it: we are called to make a change, a reversal of the old ways, a new beginning. ...[slowly] Not just believing in the Resurrection, but living like it changed everything. [pause] Because it did. [repeat] Because the Resurrection did change everything.

Let's see what's happening in the Gospel, (John 20:19-31). It's Easter evening. The disciples are locked in a room, terrified. The news has reached them that Jesus has risen, but they don't know what to do with that news yet. They're still stuck in the shadow of Friday. And then, Jesus shows up. "Peace be with you," He says.

He doesn't say, "Where were you?" He doesn't scold them for hiding. He offers peace. And then, He shows them His wounds, not to shame them, but to say, "It's really me. I've been through it, and I'm still here."

And in that moment, everything shifts. The Resurrection moves from theory to reality. It's not just something Mary saw at the tomb. It's now something they've experienced. They saw Him, touched Him, heard His voice.

But Thomas wasn't there. And when the others tell him, he doesn't believe it. He wants his own experience. And for a whole week, he waits. It's easy to paint Thomas as the doubter, but honestly? He's just the one who says out loud what the others were all feeling until they saw Jesus for themselves.

And Jesus honors that. A week later, Jesus comes back, and goes straight to Thomas. No shame, no rebuke ... just an invitation: "Put your finger here. See my hands. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas responds with one of the clearest, [slowly] most powerful confessions in all the Gospels: "My Lord and my God!"

For the apostles, this is not just about belief in a fact. This is a total shift in identity and relationship. The Resurrection changes who Jesus is for Thomas.

That's what we're aiming for. A faith that's not afraid to ask questions, that seeks experience with the living Christ, and that ultimately leads to transformation.

But John 20 isn't just a story about belief.... It's a commissioning. Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

In other words, the Resurrection isn't the end of the story. It's the beginning of their calling. They're not just receivers of grace; they're carriers of grace now. They are sent. Into the world. With the Spirit. With peace. With purpose.

Now let's look at what's happening in Acts (5:27-32). And this is important! The disciples have gone from fear to boldness. They are before the council,

the same leadership that helped send Jesus to the cross. And the disciples say, flat-out, "**We must obey God rather than human authority.**"

That was not their pre-Resurrection courage: this is a new courage. That's not how they would have acted before their leader's execution. Remember they went into hiding. What bolsters up the apostles now is Resurrection courage. The Spirit has created something new in them.

Peter's sermon here is short and unequivocal. He tells the plain truth of what happened: [slowly] "You killed him. God raised him. We are witnesses."

And that word...witness...is key. Peter and the apostles are not just talking; they are testifying to something they've seen, something they've experienced. That's Resurrection courage. It's about living in such a way that people can tell something important happened. [pause] And that applies to us as well.

Revelation 1:4-8 [slowly] projects us out to a cosmic scale. It takes us out of and beyond our earthly existence...to the One who is, ... and who was, ... and who is to come. The Alpha and the Omega. Jesus isn't just risen from the dead. Jesus reigns. The one who was tried, scourged, and executed... is now the "ruler of the kings of the earth." ... Ruler of everything.

What does this cosmic view of Resurrection mean for us? It means our faith isn't just personal ... it's global. .. Cosmic ... Eternal.. We don't just follow an ancient teacher. We serve a living King.

So what do we do with all of this?

We live like the Resurrection matters.

We step into the new year of grace that the Easter Resurrection begins, with renewed commitment [slowly] to show the world what we believe by how we live.

The Resurrection gives us three clear invitations:

1. Make room for peace.

Jesus' first word to the disciples is "Peace." Not judgment, not "I told you so," but peace.

What if we led with peace in the way we behave? In our homes, at work, in our communities, even on the internet? What if Resurrection people were known not for anxiety or anger or judgement...but for peace?

I don't mean a weak passivity. I mean a strength, a Resurrection courage. It confirms for us ... **who** we are and ... **whose** we are.

2. Be honest like Thomas.

Historically, Thomas gets a bad rap, but his honesty leads to deeper faith, doesn't it? And Jesus doesn't shame him for needing to see and touch.

By the way, this faith isn't pretending to have all the answers. It's the ability to stay still and not run from doubt. We might put it like this: "It's staying in the room long enough for Jesus to show up." It's being willing to say, "my belief is not there yet, but I'll come back next week, and I'll listen..."

If you're in a season of doubt or waiting, you're not alone. And you're not disqualified from the Christian community.

3. Live like a witness.

Peter said, "We are witnesses." That's not just **their** job. It's ours too.

We don't have to preach like Peter or write like John. But we can live in a way that reflects grace, courage, peace, and hope.

We can be a people who are reconciled through the Holy Spirit. We can be a people who [slowly] forgive, who listen, who serve, and who speak truth with love.

We can be a people who don't just profess faith with words, but show it in our actions. Remember, that's what today's Collect is praying for: lives that match our beliefs.

I didn't forget to include Psalm 118 in this sermon. In it we see those words shouted in celebration as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the young colt.

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Now, in the light of the Resurrection, those words carry even more weight. The stone that the builders rejected really did become the cornerstone. This isn't just long ago poetry; it is prophetic.

So, yes, this feels like a new year. Because it is. Not on the calendar, but in our hearts, in God's Kingdom.

[pause] The tomb is still empty...Jesus is still alive... And we are still called.

So, ... let's go live like it.

"LET US PRAY":

Gracious and risen Lord,

You stepped into our fear with peace, into our doubt with compassion, and into our lives with purpose.

Thank You for the gift of the Resurrection, not just as a past event, but as present courage and power.

Help us to live as a people who have seen the empty tomb and met the living Christ.

Give us courage like Peter, honesty like Thomas, and the deep peace that comes from knowing You are with us.

Send us into the world not just as believers, but as bold witnesses who show in our lives what we profess by our faith.

By Your Spirit, may we be beacons of hope, instruments of grace, and reflections of Your love.

In the name of the One who is, and was, and is to come, our Lord and our God.
Amen.