

April 23, 2017  
Easter 2  
Doubting Disciples – Acts of the Apostles  
Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31  
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Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!  
Peace be with you! From our risen Lord and God!

You came back!

What joy we experienced last Sunday! The biggest blow-out celebration and party of the entire church year! This sanctuary was packed! We shouted “Christ is risen!” We broke out in unrestrained Alleluias. Even the children got involved, passing Alleluias!

The rollercoaster ride from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday is always exhilarating and exhausting. We welcome Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with loud Hosannas, waving branches. Like the disciples, we race after the king, believing Jesus will be the one to free us from the oppression of Empire.

After that joyous parade things seemed to quiet down and we went back to our daily routine, not even noticing what this king of ours was up to. But the religious authorities in Jerusalem kept their eye on him. This guy, Jesus was a trouble-maker for them.

Then, as Passover approached, Jerusalem became a bustling trade center. Everyone was rushing to prepare their homes for the Passover and all the ritual that goes with that Holy Jewish Festival.

Even Jesus and his disciples were making preparations. We began OUR solemn remembrance of Jesus’ passion and death on Maundy Thursday, recalling the day that Jesus gave a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us. We recalled how he demonstrated his servanthood by washing the feet of his disciples. We remembered again in the Eucharist how he gave his body and blood as the new covenant between God and humans. We wrestled with the pain and the grief of the cross - Jesus is crucified! after the Good Friday reading of Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion and death several of you said “it’s so SAD”. Yes, yes it is . . . on many levels it is very sad. It would be tragic if we left it there, at the tomb.

The women, though waited through the long Sabbath, and we waited with them, to tend to the body of the teacher they loved and now grieve. Finally, the long night was past and according to the Evangelist Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the grave, only to find it empty.

About now, you’re thinking...Pr. Dorothy, we heard all of this last week...Yes, yes you did.

How many of you have small children, grandchildren, neighbor children, WERE children? How often have they asked you to read that favorite book of theirs?

My grandkids ask to read the same book every time they visit. We all know it from memory, but we read it anyway. We read it last night – The Twelve Cats of Christmas! Why wouldn’t we tell the story of Jesus over and over, year after year? We cannot hear it too often.

Today's gospel text, read every year on the Sunday after Easter adds the astonishing and blessed conclusion to the sad and terrifying story of Good Friday and the mysterious events of sunrise on the first day of the week.

When we left the story last week WE were breathless hearing of earthquakes and angels and Jesus greeting the women.

We heard the good news! Christ is Risen, Alleluia!

The disciples heard the good news from Mary Magdalene and they locked themselves in a room for fear of the Jews.

Why should they be afraid of the Jews? They ARE Jews. They are afraid of the Jewish religious leaders who had insisted on putting Jesus to death, afraid that those very leaders would come looking for the group that had supported Jesus, the criminal.

Easter Sunday marks the beginning of the 50 days of Easter. The first scripture reading each week will be a scene from the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts recounts the rest of the story. In the Book of Acts we discover how the disciples, the students, obeyed Jesus' command to spread the good news outside of Jerusalem. They struggled, they were afraid, they were persecuted and put to death by religious and political leaders. They quarreled with one another. But, they persevered. There were astonishing numbers of converts. The apostles, the sent ones, boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ, risen and ascended.

We will follow the apostles as they preach the good news to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the world. We will learn from them that it's ok, even expected that we will be afraid. We will hear their disagreements about how the community of believers should be structured, what's important in worship, who is in, who is out . . . the same disagreements we face in our generation. The disciples gathered behind closed doors a week after Jesus first appeared. Here WE are a week after hearing the good news behind these closed doors. How have we responded to the good news we heard last week? Are we afraid of anything? What forces keep us from sharing the good news?

It is scary to tell my neighbor "guess what I heard this morning? Christ is Risen!" We tell friends and neighbors about the rousing Easter music, the choir never sounded better.

Today dear friends we are called to be witnesses to the risen Christ! Jesus speaks to us when he says "As the Father sent me, so I send you". Jesus sends us out to tell the good news.

Jesus breathed the power of the Holy Spirit onto those early disciples. We, too have received the power of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. And, like those early disciples, we are afraid.

Jesus does not rebuke, Jesus instead says "Peace be with you". What you see here is real.

What you see in this Eucharistic meal is real, touch, taste and see that this is the risen Christ . . . do not disbelieve but believe. How can we believe what we have not seen? Martin Luther, in his explanation of the third article of the Apostle's Creed reminds us that we cannot believe on our own.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we believe. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we move from uncertainty and fear to belief. We cannot say, as Mary Magdalene or the disciples did "We have seen the LORD". But we can claim with Thomas that Jesus is "My LORD and my God" because we have received from Jesus the blessing of belief without seeing.

Jesus commissioned those early disciples to tell the story. We too are sent out to tell the good news. We are sent out to forgive one another as Jesus forgives us, We are sent out to tell the good news of the life-giving revelation of Jesus the Christ to those who have not heard.

We have the testimony of a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. We have the power of the Holy Spirit within us. We have the blessing of Jesus Christ on us.

Unlock the door of uncertainty and fear! Go! Share the good news!  
Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God!