**4/27/25**

**Doubt & Fear**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**John 20:19-31 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome and Happy Easter to all of you out there in the pews and on our conference call. I am glad that we are all back here once again. I am glad that we made it through Holy Week and the Three Days together. I am glad that we went to several services, said several prayers, sang several hymns, and conducted ourselves in a different way than we typically do throughout the rest of the year. However, the real question is… How do we keep this Resurrection experience alive and going, and not just celebrate it on Easter Sunday? How do we remain the very Easter people that we are called to be? How do we go and continue to share the total and complete love, compassion, forgiveness, grace, and mercy that none of us deserves, yet that was delivered to us on Easter so many years ago?

I know that is a lot of questions. I know it is probably much deeper than you thought I might go right out of the gates. However, last evening when I had Pastor Daniel Fields and Reverend Maria Brooks texting me about their sermon ideas and mindset, little did I know that was going to create a different fire and passion in me. Little did I know that I was going to dive in to this the way that I did despite already having five pages typed, and feeling as if I was already going in a pretty awesome direction. Although, that is the best part of communication, and that is the very essence of Proverbs 27:17. For “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.” (2, NRSVUE)

So, we really do need to explore what keeps us going. We need to explore what keeps us coming back here each Sunday. We need to even explore what will draw our family, friends, and community members back here with us each and every Sunday other than just coming on Easter? That is precisely why it is a blessing to be in this community and experience the season of Easter together for these fifty days. We actually hold fast to this very season in order to not just celebrate one day and be done. We try to find a better understanding of the very mystery that has occurred. For the resurrection is something that was never heard of or ever seen before. It is not just something that folks back then really came to grasp fully despite actually living through it and experiencing it. It is not just something that we fully comprehend to this very day despite our very own faith and belief. It is not just some ordinary occurrence; it is an extraordinary one at that.

With the resurrection there are several key stories and accounts that provide additional comfort and understanding, and that is precisely what we will explore together in this very place over this season of Easter. That’s also why we need to continue to invite our family, friends, and community members back to this space so that they can experience and explore these things more in depth with us as well. So that they can get fed just like we do each and every week. So that they can come to this table and experience forgiveness of sins and a love and compassion that they cannot get out there on their own in this world. So, let’s buckle in together and explore things as we try and figure some stuff out so we can go from this place and share it and continue to be inviting and loving of others.

As you can imagine I could go ahead and beat your ear and focus on the all-too-common topic of Thomas and his doubt. You know the guy that did not believe what his brothers told him and experienced because he was off doing who knows what? You know that guy who said he would not believe unless he got to see and experience Jesus in his risen form for himself? That guy! That Thomas! I mean after all of these years and studies I still do not know why Thomas gets such a bad rap. I do not understand why he is stuck with such an undesirable nickname. Now, I will admit that I may be a little more bothered by this because Thomas is actually my middle name. So, I feel like I have to defend him a little bit. So, defend him I will.

Now, if we really dig deep into our stories, and even the recent ones, then we realize we had a similar situation and similar person just this last Sunday. On Easter we actually had Peter in the exact same position, believe it or not. He may not have fully believed what the women came back and proclaimed to everyone following their findings at the tomb. He was not there with the women at the tomb when they saw what they saw, just like Thomas was not there with the other disciples in the room when they encountered a Risen Christ. However, what is frustrating in my mind, and what has me getting all defensive here is that Peter is not even considered or nicknamed a doubter as well. The humor that I actually find in all of this is just so ironic. However, if we really pay some close attention here then we really can argue this doubt piece for both of them. For both Thomas and Peter were active, they got off their butts and were out there. They were not reclining or sitting back, they were not locked in a room in fear. They were out and about. Peter ran to the tomb pondering all that he could encounter on the way, but also having doubt and fear. Thomas was out and about probably doing ministry, even though we are never actually told where he was, but he was not locked up in the room with everyone else in doubt and fear.

Now, another question I happen to have for you is… Do you happen to recall a newsletter article from just a few seasons ago that I shared in our quarterly newsletter about devotionals? If you happen to then you might possibly recall that I usually dive into several different daily devotionals. One of them that I have been in over the past two years really provided some alternative substance and mindset to today’s focus for this Gospel Reading. It got me to thinking that if this mindset was good enough for Martin Luther to write about and share back in 1526, then I needed to do my best to do the very same thing. For he blazed a path so that I can follow in his footsteps instead of stumbling and trying to recreate the proverbial wheel. Instead of actually trying to summarize what Martin Luther wrote for his Sermon on the First Sunday after Easter in 1526, I am just going to ask you to sit back and listen to the very words I read this past Friday from Day by Day We Magnify You. “What did the disciples fear? They feared death. Yes, they were in the midst of death. But why did they fear death? Because of sin, for if they had not sinned, they would not have been afraid. Death could not have harmed them, for the sting of death, by which it kills, is sin. Yet they lacked—as we all lack—the right knowledge of God. For if they had known God to be God, they would have been confident and without fear. But anyone who does not believe in God must be afraid of death. Such a one can never have a glad and sure conscience.

Whenever in such fear we cry to God, God cannot refrain from helping us. Just as Christ did not stay long outside, away from his frightened disciples, but soon was there comforting and saying, “Peace be with you, I have come, be of good cheer and do not be afraid,” so it is still. When we are afraid, God lifts us up and causes the gospel to be preached to us and thus restores to us a glad and sure conscience.

Where Christ is, yes, most certainly, the Father and the Holy Spirit surely come. Then there is pure grace and no law, pure mercy and no sin, pure life and no death, pure heaven and no hell, and there I take comfort in the works of Christ as if I had done them myself.” (4)

Now, that is pretty deep and pretty powerful for sure. I am quite sure if I looked up this sermon in its entirety there would be a lot more to share from his very mindset. However, I do not just want to offer you his words here this morning, and take the short path, or the easy way out. So, I dove in to a little more research, and really tried to pinpoint this concept of fear in an effort to try and understand it better for myself, and to be able to share it with all of you as well.

For fear is something we always deal with because we allow doubt and other things to creep in. We forget that we have the Holy Spirit with us to advocate at all times. We forget that we have Christ in our hearts at every moment. We forget that God is watching over everything and anything and has ordained all things. We lock ourselves up in our minds and in our proverbial rooms way too often. Even as I come at you with this very message at the pulpit up here today, I will also admit that I do the very same thing. It is the very unfortunate part of being human at some points. It is the very unfortunate part of trying to live and do in a world that our Triune God’s Kingdom is not even in. However, our very work here, our very sharing and caring, our very Christlike ministry to everyone and anyone that we encounter becomes the quintessential difference from just being and living. We really do live as Easter people, just like Peter and Thomas from these last two Gospel Readings, when we allow the amazement and awesomeness of Christ to totally take over our lives. We really do live as Easter people when we give it all to our Lord and Creator and allow God to work in and fully through us. We really do live as Easter people when we live out his life, death, and resurrection all year round. Doubt and Fear will fall by the wayside because that is simply how our God works in and through us. Doubt and Fear are lifted from our hearts and our minds when we really do come to see and hear the full message just like Peter and Thomas. Doubt and Fear are no longer when we can offer the very peace that Christ offers us day in and day out. Doubt and Fear really are no longer when we can say with our utmost conviction just like Thomas did in verse 28 today, “My Lord and my God!” (2) Then, and only then do we get to rejoice with no restraints or restrictions and be the Easter people we are truly called to be and announce everywhere and anywhere to everyone and anyone that Jesus Christ is Risen… **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia****!**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 April 27th, 2025

 Second Sunday of Easter

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

 © 2018

 Abingdon Press

(4) Day By Day We Magnify You

 Daily Readings for the Entire Year

 Selected from the Writings of Martin Luther

 Revised Edition

 Marshall D. Johnson, Editor

 ©2008

 Augsburg Book, Minneapolis

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Easter

 Thomas had wanted to see Jesus and touch his wounds, but when Jesus invites him

 to touch, he doesn’t need to

 April 27, 2025

 Commentary on John 20:19-31

 Jennifer Garcia Bashaw

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Easter (Year A)

 The Easter Season provides opportunities for the church to reflect on the biblical

 witness concerning the rumors of the resurrection.

 April 19, 2020

 Commentary on John 20:19-31

 Joy J. Moore

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Easter

 The season of Easter is above all a season of life: resurrection life, eternal life, or, as

 the end of this passage says, just plain “life” — “that through believing you may have

 life in his name” (verse 31).1

 April 28, 2019

 Commentary on John 20:19-31

 Frank L. Crouch

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Easter (Year B)

 Maybe you have had this experience: one of your friends comes back from seeing a

 movie, or going to a concert, or visiting a beautiful place and says to you, “You have

 got to see this!”

 April 8, 2018

 Commentary on John 20:19-31

 Mary Hinkle Shore

(9) Facebook.com

 Audrey West

 4/26/2025 Post

 “Despite the threat from powers arrayed against them…”

 (Fear Not Bracelet)

**John 20:19-31 (NRSVUE)**

The unprecedented events of the day of resurrection continue as the risen Jesus appears to his fearful disciples. A week later, after Thomas worships Jesus, Jesus pronounces that the blessings of the resurrection are also for those who “have not seen and yet believe.”

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 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.