

**Acts 4.32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1.1-22; John 20.19-31**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Easter tide is upon us!

Did you know that “our” Easter season lasts for 50 Days? We will be celebrating Easter now through the day of Pentecost. And, being Episcopalians, we seek out to ritualistically distinguish this season of the year just as we do Advent, Epiphany, Lent and Ordinary time. So, rather than looking at Easter Sunday as the end of the Lenten Season, it is increasingly becoming known as the beginning of a new season. It is a time to celebrate, as did the church in the beginning in the welcoming of newly baptized, members and to make incarnate what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

For the next several Sundays, up until the Sunday of Pentecost, the color is white. We continue with our “alleluias” through Pentecost (even though I know you all like to continue that tradition all year long. The Paschal Candle is lit and remains in a prominent position every Sunday through Pentecost. We use the New Testament for the first reading instead of the Old Testament. We will continue to hear resurrection stories in our Gospel each week.

Doubting Thomas (John)

Sharing fish with the disciples (Luke)

The Good Shepherd (John)

The Vine and the Branches (John)

The Commandments as instruction (John)

and, finally, Praying for his Disciples (John)

Some Episcopal Churches actually refrain from reciting both the Creed and the Confession during Eastertide.

And, there is a liturgy for praying the “Stations of the Resurrection” just as there is a Stations of the Cross.

Reformed Church writer, Victoria Cok, explains this well in her article entitled “breadcrumb,”

“One thing we do know about early Eastertide observances is that by the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the weeks following Easter Sunday focused on explaining the mysteries of the resurrection to the newly baptized. Eastertide was a time for the community and the newly-baptized to reaffirm and grow in their faith together. For that reason, the liturgies in these services explore the doctrines that grow out of the resurrection so that both young and mature Christians can grasp, each year, a bit more of the paschal mystery.”

And so, dear ones, it is with this as our background that I felt called to focus on the word “doubt”, referring to Thomas in the Gospel this morning as we enter this new time of being for ever-so-many reasons we need to be more intentional.#

I have been thinking a lot this past week about Thomas and his doubts and my reactions to him ... we might express that we would probably have doubts too, especially having not been there for Jesus’ first appearance. We may be forgiving ... after all ... doubt is a human response to something that seems impossible. We might be frustrated with his response. And/or we might just want to write him off.

This led me to wonder what to do with “doubt” ... you know, the doubt that exists in our world, and especially in our country at present. Our upcoming election will certainly divide our country yet once again, with each side doubting the word of the other. Doubt about vaccinations, doubt about science. Doubt about our history and whether or not to reveal the truth. Doubt about how we are to live in this new place and time.

How do we take our “doubt”, no matter which side we are on, and process our humanity in light of our baptismal covenant? How do we begin take the steps that we need to take to move toward healing and reconciling a hurting country when we’re almost split down the middle? And where do we begin?

How can we use doubt as a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block? How can we become the church that Jesus himself might find comfort in?

Jesus said to the apostles in that upper room, “Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, I send you.”

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We, both at our convention last October and at our vestry retreat learned of a new way of thinking about how to prepare ourselves going forward ... to be that church that looks and acts like Jesus. Thomas finally saw Jesus ... and, God willing, the more we think about being like Jesus and showing Jesus to the world, perhaps seekers and others who may not even be looking will see Jesus through us. This new way of thinking is currently and successfully being followed by the Diocese of Minnesota and their bishop The Rt. Rev. Craig Loya.

We are invited to become a faith community that accepts our call as it pertains to discipleship, justice, innovation and vitality.

To be more specific:

*Discipleship* means that we are to offer and explore with one another those transformative encounters with Jesus. We are to be confident that our God is a living God as we continue teaching and fellowship encouraging all to keep an intentional rule of life; preach to help people ground their own lives in God's story and to live faithfully and then share those stories with one another and live fully into God's promises.

We are to continually seek *justice* by building community with the poor and marginalized; we are to serve Jesus in the form of our neighbors, especially those who are poor, suffering or marginalized. We are to seek God's healing in relationships across differences ... especially those of race, class and religion. We are to share what we have: money, space, skills, and time in order to serve the world and mend broken relationships with God, neighbor and creation. And we are to strive, through both our words and actions, and be known as a force for love and justice in our community.

We are to develop a culture of *innovation* in becoming courageous enough to try new things. We are to continually discern the unique identity and gifts within our congregation. We are to listen attentively to our neighbors *and* the news of what is happening in our area, trusting that the Holy Spirit is acting around us. We are to continually seek out new opportunities and fresh ways to proclaim the God News in our neighborhoods and we are to try new things! New things allow us opportunities to learn from our successes and failures, watching for God to make all things new.

And, finally, we are called into a state of *vitality* as we gather to support each other's discipleship. Our relationships at church become some of the most

important relationships in our lives. We ground our leadership and ministry gatherings in prayer and scripture. And we trust that in times of conflict and change provide us with the opportunity to hear the Holy Spirit's guidance in new ways.

With that in mind, dear friends, let us all be challenged by Thomas's doubting in a new way. Let us consider our doubts and the doubts of others as we re-enter a world that is forever changed by all of the experiences we have encountered during the past few years. Let us not *in spite of*, but *because of* our Eastertide baptismal renewals set out to show just how followers of Jesus, even with differing views, can show a hurting world how to re-engage.

Let us in this new season become new people who see Jesus and his call to us, encouraging us, loving us, walking with us by again committing ourselves to accepting his call not only to follow but to lead the way for others. Let us continue by leaning into our faith rather than our doubts. We are called, not to live as Jesus lives, but to live as authentically as Jesus lived. He will be with us as our guide. He will help us change the narrative. If we believe that this is our call, we will be richer for it and have abundant lives in his name and fully prepared to offer that abundant life and extraordinary love to others. Amen.