

**The Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 23, 2017, Year A**  
**St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL**

Acts 2:14a, 22-32  
Psalm 16  
1 Peter 1:3-9  
John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”

John, the beloved disciple, wrote these words to assure us that what is written here in his gospel is everything we need to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, through whom we receive eternal life. To understand the life and mission of Jesus more fully, all we need to do is study the gospels.

John walked with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. He learned from his teachings, witnessed his miracles, saw the sick healed, the blind receive sight, the dead raised, the multitudes fed. He saw his Lord crucified and witnessed his death. With Peter, he was the first to see the empty tomb, and, as the Word says, “On the evening of the first day of the week, [that being Sunday according to the Jews who celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday, and this particular Sunday being the first Easter – on the evening of that day], the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

John witnessed all of these things personally, including the risen Christ. He was there, and he recorded what he saw, heard and learned so that we too might believe and have life in Jesus’ name. John is telling us that he did not record these events as a history or a biography of a great person so that we might have information to understand what happened. He says he wrote down what was “necessary for us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that we might have life in his name.”

This is a very important distinction between the Bible and other literature. The Bible is more than just another great piece of literature. It is unique among everything ever written in that it provides the means of salvation in written form. The Bible is the written record of God’s plan of redemption for all of mankind; everything in it is important for us to understand and apply to our lives; and there is nothing outside of the Bible that is necessary for us to know or believe for our salvation. This is a paraphrase of the opening sentence of Article VI of the Articles of Religion to which we all claim by our membership in this church to adhere and subscribe. We believe the Bible to be the foundation for everything in our lives, for what we believe and for how we then live.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul tells us that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” God himself initiated the Bible and inspired its writers. He safeguarded it from error and guided its compilation. The Bible we have is precisely the Bible God wanted us to have so that we could know him the way he wants us to know him, rather than know him in a way we have contrived to satisfy our own interests. After all, if he is this all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-present God who can give us eternal life, why would we want to limit him by our understanding rather than let him tell us what he wants us to know about himself?

Various biblical writers have warned us about this very thing. Listen to these words from Proverbs, chapter 30: “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” In Deuteronomy, chapter 4, God himself tells us: “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.” And listen to these words from St. Paul to the Galatians. They may have been written the better part of two thousand years ago, but they certainly apply today as well. Paul wrote, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

At this point, some might question these absolute statements that this is the way we are to believe and without question. They might add that mankind has made substantial advances in the way we understand things, that over the centuries philosophical pursuits and scientific analysis have led us to think more critically about such issues, and claims such as absolute truth. And they would be correct! Mankind has made wonderful academic progress over the centuries, progress that helps us to better understand the world around us and our role in it.

There is nothing anti-intellectual about being a Christian or believing that we could have eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ or that there actually is absolute truth, absolute because it comes from God and there is no higher power in the heavens or on the earth. Our human intellect is a gift from God, and he expects us to use it to his greater glory. How wonderful it is to be able to explain how so many things work in the creation around us so that we can appreciate more of who our God is and what he has created.

God has not been caught unaware by our progress in intellectual pursuit. Not at all. Look at Thomas in today’s gospel reading. He wasn’t there when Jesus appeared to the others. And when he returned and heard their reports, he had questions. What they were telling him was outside of his concept of what was possible and how things work. “Give me some evidence that I can use to understand this thing you are telling me because I’m having a hard time believing that what you are saying could be true.”

Calling Thomas a “doubter” makes him sound negative in our present cultural use of that word. Perhaps “inquirer” might be a better way to describe him. He had real concerns, as any thinking person might have when told something so unusual. So he wanted proof, because his sense of what was reasonable could not accommodate such an event. And when he was confronted with the evidence when Jesus came to visit them again, Thomas’ only response was “My Lord and my God!” He believed when he saw evidence he could understand.

Jesus knew that some of us in generations to follow would doubt also. After Thomas had seen the marks and declared his faith and understanding, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe.” Jesus is referring to us, to all of us who have come after he ascended back into heaven and are left with two-thousand year old eyewitness reports as the only evidence we have to evaluate. Or is there more?

Perhaps we too can experience the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst just as the disciples did. That’s what John is saying to us this morning. “These [events] are [recorded] that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” We have John’s record to start with. We can back that up with prayer. And then we can walk with our Lord and commune with him through his Word, the Sacrament and the presence of his Holy Spirit in our lives. These things are real and even tangible – if we first believe.

Inquire after Jesus in the Bible, through prayer and by his presence. Seek him and you will find him. Ask of him, and it will be revealed to you. Use all the intellectual powers at your disposal, and if you do so with an honest and open mind, your intellectual pursuit will find Jesus right where your faith already knows him to be.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed!* **Alleluia!**

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.