

How long does Easter last? The disciples had a clear answer to that question on Easter Eve. Our text recalls the details. ¹⁹ **On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked 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 side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** Jesus was alive. The disciples were “**overjoyed.**” Life for them was permanently changed by the Easter news. But what about us as we stand over 2 centuries away from that evening? From our perspective, the joy of Easter that we celebrated just one week ago seems to have a much shorter shelf life in our world and even in our lives. That perspective is why Jesus has brought us here to worship today. In his word the Lord has prepared a second Easter lesson for us. It comes to us through one of Jesus disciples, the man we know as Thomas. Thomas learned through his experience that the truth that Easter is not something you know like some fact of history. Easter is something you believe in your heart, and you live in your life!

Our text picks up the tale of Thomas and his Easter experience starting on Easter Sunday evening. After recounting the amazing experience of the disciples discovering their dead Lord had risen from the dead, John continues with this “Thomas detail.” ²⁴ **Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.** Thomas was not with the disciples on Easter eve. He did not see the risen Lord that night. So Thomas learned the news of the resurrection the same way we did. He was told about it. **25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”** When Thomas heard the amazing news that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead, he gave his now famous response. “**Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.**”

It was this famous response that earned him the nickname, “Doubting Thomas.” Initially we might want to fault Thomas for the unbelief he showed that night. But at the same time, we have to agree that Thomas was being very rational in his response. Thomas was evaluating the Easter news using his five senses. These senses told him that he was facing some clear and undeniable realities. **Reality number one:** Good Friday! Thomas had been to the cross of Christ. Thomas had seen the Lord Jesus die. There was no changing that. People don’t come back once they enter the grave. That was clear. **Reality number two:** Thomas noted the “locked doors” of the room in which the disciples gathered. The same Jews that hung Jesus on a cross now wanted to deal with the followers of Jesus in the same way. Thomas saw the danger they were facing. **Reality number three:** Hopelessness! For three years Thomas had followed the Lord and dreamed of the Kingdom of God he was here to establish. No where in those dreams was there any idea that Jesus would be killed by the Jews. Now those dreams were dead. There was no future. There was only loss. And so, for Thomas, the news of Easter changed nothing as far as he could see.

How easy it is for us to identify with Thomas. Thomas' reaction seems sensible to us on the surface. He was simply looking for certainty in the midst of overwhelming uncertainty. He wanted proof before he would accept any incredible Easter claims. We are not that different from Thomas. Last Sunday we proclaimed our faith in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Then we walked out of church into a world in which we expected nothing to change.

As we walked out of church, we found the same problems and challenges and losses waiting for us just the way we left them. In the face of those challenges, as we once again shoulder them, we find that the joy of Easter seems to quickly fade away. On the surface of our lives, we notice what Thomas noticed. Nothing has changed. So, it is no surprise to us that, in the week following the amazing Easter news, we found reason to worry and fear and doubt just as we did the week before. The joy and peace Jesus proclaimed at Easter seems to have a very short shelf life. The continuing challenges in our lives lead us to treat the Easter news of the resurrection of Jesus in the same way we treat other historical facts. We know the facts of the battle of Gettysburg, but that knowledge does not change our lives. And we know the facts of Jesus' resurrection, but we don't expect that knowledge to change our lives either. Easter seems to be something we simply know and then put aside as we live each day.

And that expectation and conclusion is why Jesus brings us here today. It is time we learn that the Easter Truth is not just something we know. It is something we believe in our heart and live in our life! Jesus made sure Thomas learned this. Eight days after His initial appearance, Jesus returned specifically for Thomas. Standing among the disciples once more, He repeated His greeting of peace and turned directly to Thomas. Jesus spoke these words to Thomas: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”** The risen Christ gave Thomas exactly what he had asked for—physical proof of His resurrection. Jesus gently restored him, transforming his doubt into a bold and unwavering confession of faith: **“My Lord and my God!”** Thomas recognized the very presence of God standing before him. The risen Jesus has conquered sin and death, standing victorious and offering Thomas the assurance of peace, forgiveness, and everlasting life. Suddenly Thomas realized the truth that Easter is not just something you know. It is a truth that you believe in your heart, a truth that changes your life from that day on. In that experience Thomas learned that Easter changes everything.

Then Jesus turned his attention to you and me and with that same Easter lesson: **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** That blessing is spoken specifically for us who live two thousand years later, who have not had the privilege Thomas received. We have never seen the nail-scarred hands or touched the wounded side of our Lord. Yet the people in this room experience the very truth

Jesus predicted. We not only know the facts of the resurrection of Jesus. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Where did this faith come from? It is not the product of our own effort. It does not flow out of some intelligent decision we made. Our faith is a product of a miracle worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, **“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”** God took the message of the Easter truth and through it worked this firm belief in our heart. We have not physically seen the risen Christ as the disciples did. But we have the living and active powerful word of God. The Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through our Bibles which are filled with eyewitness accounts, promises, and testimonies about the Resurrection of Jesus. He touches our hearts through the sacraments which assure us of Jesus’ presence and grace. He surrounds us with believers whose lives testify to the risen Lord’s presence among us. The Holy Spirit surrounds us with the powerful Easter message and through it fills our hearts with faith. That faith makes us certain that, even though nothing on the surface of our lives has changed, Easter changes everything.

The biggest change in our daily lives that our Easter faith teaches us is simply this: no matter what challenge we might be facing, now is not the time for worry. Now is not the time to be afraid. Now is the time to trust the risen Lord who walks by our side. What problem or challenge are you carrying in your heart at this moment that the risen Christ can’t turn into a blessing. This is the Lord who raised the dead, cured the blind, made lame people walk, and deaf people hear. Surely the risen Christ can deal with any health challenge we face. The risen Lord cares for every creature on earth. He is well aware of every need we have and will provide. No matter what the challenge, now is the time to be at peace trusting Jesus every step of the way. Easter changes everything, even as nothing seems to change in our life.

Not only can we in faith live that change each day, we can share that change with the world around us. That is the Easter mission God has given to each of us. We live in a world filled with people who are worried and afraid every day. Fear and doubt are so common that people consider it normal, since their lives face so many challenges. Each of us have people close to us, people we care about, who live with worry and fear every day. And we hold in our hearts the one thing they need. We know that Jesus lives. We know that through the forgiveness he earned for all people, we have peace with God each day. We know that now is not the time to worry or be afraid because God is by our side and is eager to bless us. This equips us to those we love and assure them of what we know. Christ is risen. There is no longer any reason to worry or to be afraid. There is only reason to trust and to be at peace.

Remember the words Jesus spoke when he greeted the disciples on Easter Eve and again one week later. **“Peace be with you.”** This “peace” is our new reality. The Easter truth calls us to live each day **“by faith and not by sight.”** It is time to ignore our senses when they tell us it is time to worry or doubt or be afraid. Jesus lives and stands by our side. There is no

more reason to worry and fear. Now is the time for confidence and hope. With Jesus by our side in the face of each challenge in life, we can put into practice what the Apostle Paul said. **“Be anxious for nothing, but by pray and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”** As you leave God’s house today, carry the Easter words of the risen Christ in your heart. **“Peace be with you.”** And put that peace into practice with each new day.