

**April 12, 2026**  
**St. John's Tappahannock**  
**Rev. Nanette Woodworth**

**John 20:19-31**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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."

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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## **Sermon**

Today is the second Sunday of the Easter season, a season which will stretch a total of seven weeks, and include Ascension day. It will include many of Jesus appearances, and touch on the many emotions of his disciples – doubt, meaning, fear. That will bring us to the completion of the first half of our liturgical year! Then we begin the season of Pentecost, which is filled less with stories about Jesus life, and more with all the wisdom stories, teachings and healings which made up his ministry.

The story of Doubting Thomas does not actually start with him.

It starts with the disciples, minus Thomas, in the upper room where they had enjoyed the Passover feast, now called the Last Supper. Where was Thomas? We do not know for sure, but maybe he had gone out searching for Jesus. Maybe he was talking with Mary and the other women and asking a lot of questions. But he was not hovering in fear with the other disciples. They were nervous about the fact that the authorities were looking for Jesus' body which was missing, as well as whoever stole it, and of course the disciples were suspects.

So far no one has seen Jesus except Mary Magdelene, and John and Peter had seen the empty tomb.

So not surprisingly, when Jesus entered the room where his disciples were hiding out, his opening words were "Peace be with you." The other reason he wished them peace is because the doors were locked, and somehow he just came into the room anyway. So Jesus showed them his hands and his side, and again said, "Peace be with you", as they marveled at this sign.

Maybe they remembered him saying "I am the door", or more likely that is for later readers like us who can analyze the narrative poignancy. But not only does he put in their minds that he is in his spiritual body now, more proof of the Resurrection, in addition he is, as the door, narratively the one and only one through whom they will have life going forward.

Jesus then harks back to his lengthy speech about how the Holy Spirit will be their guide, and reminds them that they are being sent. They are not to sit in the darkness frozen in fear. They are to go out into the world and like him, dispel the darkness and invite people into the path of Light by becoming followers of the Way. So he actually breathes on them, and Ruah, the spirit of God, undoubtedly calmed their fears, because who could stand in the presence of Jesus without immediately being attuned to his peaceful presence.

Next time they saw Thomas and told them of all this, he said, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.

Then comes the story we all know and cherish about Thomas. Eight days later, when he arrived to where the disciples had gathered again behind closed doors that second evening, he immediately said to Thomas, whose doubt he knew, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” The rest is history.

So What is the lesson here for us?

- a) We should not doubt like Thomas
- b) His doubt is not a failure of faith, but rather a path that leads to faith

Right, it is the latter choice. So it turns out the word *believe* appears about 90 times in John. It not only means an intellectual act, it also means to have faith, to entrust oneself to Jesus. There is a relational aspect to faith.

When Jesus said to Thomas at the end of the passage “Do not doubt but believe”, he is not simply asking him to change his mind. He is inviting him into a full trusting relationship. Yet he still gives Thomas what he wanted – evidence. He let him touch his hands and his side.

And let’s not forget the meaning of the water and blood that flowed from Jesus pierced side when directed by the religious authorities, the soldiers came to remove the bodies that had been crucified. They broke the legs of the others, which accelerated death as Sabbath approached, by causing asphyxiation

because they could no longer hold themselves up with their legs to get a breath. However they pierced Jesus side because he was already dead.

The early church saw this event as a sign and a symbol. Water and Blood, Baptism and Eucharist, the streams of our sacramental life. So the side of Christ is not only a wound; it is a place of birth. The birth of the Church – the source from which life in Christ pours out. In today's story, Thomas reaches into it, into that sacred opening, and is completely transformed. His words, "My Lord and my God" testify to his faith, which has erased his doubt.

Thomas missed the first post resurrection gathered community on the night of the Resurrection. It is important to highlight the fact that he was absent, and isolated, probably because of his doubt. But at Jesus' second appearance Thomas sees him within the company of his disciples. We too share the Eucharist together, in community.

Faith in this episode is not a leap in the dark, it is walking towards the light that is already present. So for us modern Christians too, doubt is not an obstacle to encountering Jesus; it can become a path that leads us to finding the risen Lord.

Above all, don't you also love this scripture: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." After that first generation of Christians, millions more became followers, all from the Word spoken by Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit speaking through all believers.

May our encounter at the table have the same effect it had on Thomas. May our eyes be opened, our hearts consoled, our voices say, "My Lord and my God." May we have strong faith, and lean in fully to the one who shared his wounds not as a sign of defeat, but as a source of transformation.

Let us remember that Jesus blessed all those, including you and me, who through Thomas' experience will believe in him, and have faith in his Resurrection.

*For He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24*

**So here is another question.**

We have discovered that through Thomas we can believe in the Resurrection without having seen Jesus in his spiritual body and having touched his wounds.

What does resurrection with a small “r” mean in our lives today?

Besides the Resurrection of Jesus *upon which we all stake our lives now and into eternal life*, is there any other way to consider the term?

Inspired by a friend who was a member of my high school graduation class, who is a methodist pastor in NYC, and said something in his Easter sermon that speaks to this question. In order to understand what I mean by resurrection with a small r, listen to his words. **1**

*After Mary and then John and Peter saw that the tomb was empty, and later understood that Jesus was Risen, what was really important was, what about them?*

*And what about us?*

*We know that Jesus is risen! He’s good!*

*What about you? What about me?*

*Where’s our resurrection?*

*Because resurrection is less about how we are going to die, and more about how we are going to live.*

*Resurrection in Latin is Anastasis – it means to rise! to renew! resurgence and revival –*

*The people who saw the empty tomb did not see the Resurrection but they resurrected from deep despair and grief to amazing hope and nothing short of astonishment!*

*They knew the love, justice and compassion of the Jesus movement must be resurrected.*

*They knew there was work to do. And they knew that they spent 3 years with Jesus to learn how to do it.*

*They knew how to answer callousness and cruelty with compassion and were pumped to get out there and with the help of the Holy Spirit begin to be Jesus in the world.*

Let's segway to what I see as the greater message of the successful Artemis II voyage around the moon which culminated in splashdown on Friday. This is another example of a resurrection with a small "r".

Let's consider how people of different cultures in our diverse country who were at first discriminated against and now are well integrated into every aspect of our society. It was not until the 1960's that people of color and women fought to be represented in all professions. That we have made great progress in that is a resurrection with a small "r". And the space program is a marvelous example of the best of who we are as human beings working together for a common and admirable goal.

I am sure many of you watched the splashdown of Artemis II yesterday. There is nothing more exciting than seeing astronauts coming home safely after traveling in space. While we were waiting for Reid Wiseman (Commander), Victor Glover (Pilot), Christina Hammock Koch (Mission Specialist), and Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen (Mission Specialist). to emerge from the capsule, many former astronauts were interviewed.

Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman to travel into space when she served as a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour in 1992, shared her feelings about the International Space Program. She said it is one

of the special places where, in contrast to all the strife over difference in nationalities and heritage that boggles the mind here on earth, those who go into space, prepare for it extensively working side by side with those who may look different, but who do not see difference. May we be inspired by this as we walk into the future together.

Let's try to bring renewed energy to our common life at St. John's, and let the Holy Spirit guide us into new and exciting ways to grow and make connections in our region.

## **Conclusion**

John 20:30-31

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[a]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[b]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 21:25

<sup>25</sup> But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

**Amen**

## **Resources**

1. K Karpen; Easter Sermon: [www.Youtube.com](http://www.Youtube.com); Where's your resurrection? (excerpt)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&si=0XTm2Qg52J3PG1we&v=M0AzChKBBtg&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwY2xjawRI1TFleHRuA2FlbQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzknNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe7QM4EuNKI-t\\_bY9sA3UA9FECbaUuolpX4PecyajMVutjyXaMPAJGVea-xHY\\_aem\\_uheV8YnHwComRCGDHz6\\_mg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&si=0XTm2Qg52J3PG1we&v=M0AzChKBBtg&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwY2xjawRI1TFleHRuA2FlbQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzknNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe7QM4EuNKI-t_bY9sA3UA9FECbaUuolpX4PecyajMVutjyXaMPAJGVea-xHY_aem_uheV8YnHwComRCGDHz6_mg)