

Sermon: 2 Easter, Year A
April 12, 2026

St. Stephen's Parish
Pittsfield, MA

Acts 2: 14a, 22-32; John 20:19-31

I replaced the word “Jews” in our Gospel story with the word “Judeans” since modern scholars and translators often suggest alternatives to better reflect the context of John’s community and avoid the implication of a blanket indictment of all Jewish people. The word “Judeans” is the most popular and scholarly alternative, as the text often refers to people living in Judea and Jerusalem, rather than all Jewish people everywhere. Tragically, still today, whole peoples are being scapegoated and targeted, and now a whole civilization is being threatened with extinction in a war of choice.

So, given that terrible backdrop along with too many others , if you are among those struggling these days with what it means to be a person of faith, rest assured, you are in good company. And as we heard on Easter Day last week, the first witnesses to the Resurrection didn’t have an easy time of it either. That first Easter morning, we’ll remember hearing from last week was one of chaos fueled by grief and a serious lack of sleep.

Today, we learn that’s not the end of the story. There’s more to come, much more to come because the Resurrection is not revealed to Mary or the others as a one time event. Resurrection is more like an awakening, a stunning realization that confronts them over and over again. And every time it does, it’s as shocking as if it were the first time.

In all the Resurrection stories of the Christian scriptures, Jesus appears. He shows up and it's a surprise every time. He doesn't seem to stay long. It's clear in some accounts his appearing is mystical. In other words, if a film crew had been there, they may not have been able to record anything. But in other accounts, his physicality is front and center. As in today's Gospel story, Jesus insists that they can touch him. Later on, he sits down to eat with two other disciples. In one story, he cooks them breakfast and then gives Simon Peter a chance to redeem his denying of Jesus, the biggest regret of his life. As if to say, "Peter, you don't have to live with that guilt anymore."

But one thing all these stories have in common, as soon as the disciples recognize Jesus for who he is [SNAP FINGERS], he's gone. And the fact that he disappears doesn't seem to surprise anyone. Which suggest, beloved friends, that these are not accounts of life as we know it. No, these are stories to describe what it feels like to glimpse another dimension of life beyond this world. The power isn't in the details of the story, but what the story is attempting to convey. And that is, the lived experience and hope that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. "To believe in the Risen Jesus ... " this is Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, "To believe in the Risen Jesus is to trust that the generative power of God is active in the world."

It is those very stories of the Risen Jesus and the generative power of God that exhorts us all for the hope that lies within me, within you. At the heart of that hope is that Resurrection is about life after death which is not a uniquely

Christian concept. Nearly all spiritual traditions which human beings have sought to find meaning share a sense that there is more to life than what we know. There is indeed another realm. And whenever we try to get too specific about that life beyond what we know, we surely get it wrong, although, of course, we can't know for certain on this side of things.

I believe in that realm, not that I have proof, but I've come to trust it. And when I think of those I love who have crossed over and especially those I have struggled to love, my sense is that they're all right and quite possibly onto other things now. And when I consider the countless human beings whose lives are snuffed out in the cruelest possible ways for which other human beings are often responsible, there's some consolation in knowing that no more harm can come to them. It doesn't take away the outrage of such death, but alongside the grief of it, there is gratitude (?), for what lies beyond what we know for them.

Yet, Resurrection is not only about what happens after we die. It is also the lived experience of humankind. On this side of physical death, Jesus' death and resurrection is an icon of assurance that God knows human suffering, and lives with us through the worst that can happen and that we do to one another. And that with God, in God, the worst is never the end. "Put your finger here, [Thomas], and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." With God, the worst is never the end, Thomas.

Whenever we imagine Christianity as a faith of prosperity and triumph, I worry that our gospels aren't being read carefully enough because that's not the

story they tell. The gospels tell of a God who suffers particularly around, alongside those that humankind would rather forget about . And that God comes alongside us in the person of Jesus through what we must endure, not in triumph, but in amazement that life can go on after something or someone has been lost to us.

And the mercy of Christ meets us there in the crucible of *real* life where *real* things happen, and not all of them are easy. And from the ashes of what dies, from the wounds that stay with us no matter what, Resurrection is the promise that new life is possible, Thomas. It's not the old life. It's not even the life we necessarily want, but it's life. It's life. And it's not a one time event for us. It's a series of awakenings like that throughout our lives, each one as shocking, as surprising as the last.

In summary, I believe Jesus lived to show us how to love, but he died to forgive us for the ways we fail to love. And he is risen to assure that there is life after death, that we are forgiven, and that he will be with us always. And not passively, but as an active presence in our lives. He is here to inspire and guide, to forgive and to empower us, to love as he loves, and to forgive as he forgives.

To believe in the Risen Jesus is to trust and follow the generative power of God active in the world. If God hasn't given up on us, if God hasn't given up on us, we need not give up on ourselves, or each other, or our hope for a better day for all God's children and for this world. And we are witnesses to the Resurrection now.

Beloved church family, the journey of coming to faith, specifically my beliefs in Jesus' Resurrection which I've shared with you today has been slow and winding, but I've come to realize that believing is not about holding an opinion, but to believe is to treasure, to hold something beloved, to give our heart over to it without reservation. And doubt? Well, doubt always comes along for the ride, doesn't it? And it seems that the problem is never doubt per se, but the direction we let it take us.

John is spot-on in his final words to us in his Gospel today, " ... that through believing, you have life in his name." If what we believe in this life of faith, however we believe it, gives us life and gives life to the whole world, let's run with it.

Amen.

The Rev. David DeSmith