

What Happened Next
Sunday, April 27, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Susan Russell

*Breathe on us, breath of God
Fill us with life anew.
That we may love what thou dost love
And do what thou wouldst do. Amen.*

And just like that it is the Second Sunday of Easter.

The lilies are browning around the edges, the ears are off the chocolate bunny, the Easter dress is at the cleaners and the awesome impact of those “alleluias” we gave up for Lent fades as we get back to the “everything we were going to do after Easter” list – forgetting or ignoring that Easter is not a one-day event but a fifty-day season.

My favorite Easter card says: *The great Easter truth is not that we are going to live newly after death, but that we are to be new here and now by the power of the resurrection*

But “here and now” is easier said than done. Yes, we are “Easter people” but as the lilies fade and the chocolate gets eaten, it’s very easy to make Easter a Sunday to remember rather than a truth to live -- particularly in these troubled and trying times.

Well, if it’s any consolation, our 1st century spiritual ancestors struggled as well. Scripture gives us a whole series of “post - resurrection” stories that have two things in common:

- #1 - Jesus showed up and**
- #2 - The disciples didn't get it.**

As Luke tells the story, the women at the empty tomb had to be reminded by the angel about the part where Jesus said he would rise after three days -- and then when they reported back the disciples didn't believe them.

There are four post-resurrection stories in John's gospel. The first is the one where Mary thought Jesus was the gardener until he spoke her name. The second and third are in our gospel for today -- when Jesus appears to the disciples in the locked room when Thomas is out running an errand and then returns when Thomas is back in the room.

The fourth is in the 21st chapter -- when Jesus appears to the disciples on the lakeshore. And yet the conclusion that story reads: “This was now the third time Jesus appeared after he was raised from the dead.” Which means either John couldn’t count ... or the appearance to Mary **didn’t** count because she was a woman. I’ll let you do the math.

Which brings me to the illustration on the cover of your service leaflet today by cartoonist David Hayward. When it first appeared a few years ago, I shared it on my social media platforms with the title

"The Feast of the Mansplaining of the Resurrection" – and I shared as well Hayward's reflection on the reaction he got to the post:

"When I posted a cartoon illustrating women being the first to witness and report the resurrection and that the men were going to take it from there, what drew my attention was the amount of mansplaining I received, like:

"Well, actually, an angel was the first witness"

"Well, actually, in the Roman Empire..."

"Well, actually, it was progressive that they were allowed the honor of reporting it to the men, but Jesus told his male disciples that they should be the ones to report this around the world" ... and on and on and on.

I decided it must be exhausting being a woman because in just one day I got exasperated, angry, and hopeless. I was even tempted to shut up because life's just easier that way. I shared this frustration with my online community and the women there said ... "You have no idea."

David Hayward's cartoon tapped into the sad truth
that two thousand years later we're still getting stuck
on who gets to tell and who needs to be told
instead of getting all hands on deck
proclaiming the great Easter truth
*that we are to be new here and now
by the power of the resurrection*

I'll get back to that in a minute, but first let's return to the fearful disciples -- hiding behind locked doors.

Jesus appeared and "breathed on them." In John's Gospel, this is the birthday of the Church ... a "fast forward" to the Pentecost story we will celebrate at the end of this Easter season -- when the Spirit fills the disciples with faith rather than fear and they began to take up the ministry of Jesus on earth: to become the Body of Christ -- new, here and now, by the power of the resurrection.

In this story of new life and creation there are echoes of Genesis, as the Spirit brooded over creation and God breathed life into the first humans and of Ezekiel where new life is breathed into the valley of dry bones. It is the story we hear every single year on the second Sunday of Easter.

*Breathe on me breath of God
Fill me with life anew
That I may love what thou dost love
And do what thou wouldst do.*

It is a favorite hymn which has become a favorite prayer: to be filled with the breath of God and to understand more fully the will of God is a way to understand what Easter as a way of life is all about.

Not only to *know* what God would do:

To *do* what God would do.

And to continue to ask ourselves the question Tim left us with at the end of his sermon last Sunday:
What happens next?

On this Second Sunday of Easter as the lilies are browning around the edges, the ears are off the chocolate bunny and the Easter dress is at the cleaners, I suggest “what happens next” is living into a journey that consists of taking one step at a time – trusting that even if we take a mis-step, we never journey so far from God that the life-giving breath of that Spirit is beyond our reach: even when it seems impossible to believe. Even when we doubt.

This morning, that’s the lesson we learn from Thomas.

Thomas -- one of the faithful twelve -- goes down in history forever as “doubting Thomas” for his refusal to accept the testimony of others and demanding his own experience of the risen Lord.

What took him away from the community that day? Why was he out of the room? Had they he drawn the short straw when it was time for someone to go out for pizza? Had they gotten into another argument about who was the greatest and Thomas had left in a huff or gone off to compose himself?

Imagine, missing one Sunday, and coming back to hear “Guess who showed up while you were gone?” Would you believe it?

I’m a little bemused, actually, about how quickly we make Thomas the poster child for faithless doubt when none of them were batting 1000 on the post-resurrection encounters.

The women at the tomb who didn't get it until the angel reminded them, the men who didn’t believe the women ... and these “faithful” disciples -- after Jesus showed up and breathed the Holy Spirit on them -- still hiding behind a locked door a week later.

One of Thomas’ great virtues was that he absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There was an uncompromising honesty about him -- he was not afraid to own his doubt.

Many of you will remember these words from Dr. Verna Dozier -- my favorite Anglican theologian -- who wrote about doubt:

Doubt is not the opposite of faith: fear is. Fear will not risk that even if I am wrong, I will trust that if I move today by the light that is given me, knowing it is only finite and partial, I will know more and different things tomorrow than I know today, and I can be open to the new possibility I cannot even imagine today.

Thomas had doubts, but he refused to surrender to the fear which kept the disciples shut up in that locked room. He both ventured out and then had the courage to return: to face a community which had had an experience he did not share and be willing to insist on his own experience of God.

And it was in the community that Jesus came to him, and without so much as a confession or absolution, offered him what he needed to believe: “Need to see my hands: here you go. Want to touch my side: go for it.” Jesus showed up, met him where he was and gave him what he needed to believe.

Of all the disciples, for me the story of Thomas speaks with particular power to generations of Christians who inherit the stories of the risen Lord, but must -- at some point -- insist on their own experience of Christ. And through that lens, Thomas becomes not a symbol of faithlessness but of courage.

Courage to ask for what Thomas asked for: to trust that just as Jesus met Thomas where he was and gave him what he needed to believe, he will do the same for us when we need him to. And Lord knows the "need to believe" cabin has checked in full on this Second Sunday of Easter in this year of our Lord 2025.

Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on that "need to believe" continuum, know that you are in good company
as we journey into this Easter season together --
as we claim together the awesome privilege and responsibility
of being the church in the world:
being the hands and feet of Jesus on earth:
being the place where those who come seeking the risen Christ,
doubts and all, not only seek but find
that breath of new life that God offers all creation.

And how does that happen?

As we prepare to baptize six new beloved children of God into the Body of Christ this morning, I'm remembering a baptism I attended many years ago at St. Mary's, Palms.

After placing the oil on the baby's forehead, the priest said, "Let us welcome the newly baptized." And then he added -- holding her high in his arms to face the congregation:

"And how is she going to learn to be a Christian? **By watching you.**"

All these years later I wonder: What **did** she learn by watching them?
I hope she learned that doubt is not the opposite of faith -- fear is.
I hope she learned to move by the light that was given her,
she would know more and different things
and be open to new possibilities she couldn't even imagine.

I hope she learned, like Thomas,
to ask for her own experience of the risen Christ.
I hope that experience called her to put her faith into action
And I hope she continues to ask herself the question: What happens next?

Those are some of the things I hope for.
But here are some of the things I know.

I know that here at All Saints Church
as we baptize new members into the Body of Christ
and welcome new members into the All Saints Community
we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses

-- in this realm and the next --
who know what it is to strive to follow Thomas' example.

To not settle for anything other
than their own experience of the risen Christ;
as we move today by the light that is given us,
knowing it is only finite and partial,
staying open to new possibilities we cannot even imagine today.

To proclaim the great Easter truth.
To be new here and now by the power of the resurrection
as we resist anything that is threatening to crucify anyone anywhere.

This, my sisters and brothers and gender fluid siblings
is the work of loving what God loves --
of loving our neighbors as ourselves --
of doing what God would do:
refusing to take no for an answer as we work to dismantle racism,
to stand with immigrants and refugees,
to challenge heterosexism and transphobia,
to resist the toxic theology of Christian Nationalism
and the forces of oligarchy threatening to destroy our democracy,
and on this Earth Day,
to continue our commitment to preserve and protect
this fragile earth, our island home.

And so on this second Sunday of Easter
let us give thanks that Easter is not just a Sunday but a season
and let us pray for strength and courage
to use every single one of the fifty days ahead of us
to celebrate the great Easter truth
... not that we are going to live newly after death,
but that we are to be new here and now
by the power of the resurrection.

Breathe on us.
Fill us.
Send us out ... to do what thou wouldst do
And to make what happens next ...happen. Alleluia. Amen.