

Sermon – John 20:19-31
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Grace Lutheran Church
2 Easter – Year A
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“Believing Without Seeing”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

1. Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, notable for many reasons. Today is known as the Octave Day of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday, and *Quasimodo* Sunday, too. We might name this Sunday in honor of Doubting Thomas, whose story we always hear. Today is usually a day when I go away on vacation and make an associate pastor preach. Sadly, we don't have one of those and I have nowhere to go. My favorite name for this Sunday, however, is Low Sunday. There are a handful of reasons why it's called Low Sunday, but my favorite is the most obvious: There just aren't that many people who attend worship the week after Easter. Everyone comes on Easter for the proclamation of the resurrection, brass, bonnets, and all, as well they should. But today is not usually a day with a full house. That's why today is so exciting. I'm happy to report that our in-person worship attendance has held statistically steady from last week. There are exactly as many people here this morning as there were last week! Good thing Pastor Costello showed up. Our numbers would have plummeted without him, never mind the quality of the singing! This year, however, the term takes on new meaning. This Sunday is “low” in the same way that every Sunday, every day, has been “low.” We are low emotionally, spiritually. We feel empty. We yearn to be here, even on a Sunday we might usually give ourselves permission to skip. The coronavirus pandemic lives on, and that's a low feeling. One that might even fill us with doubt. Doubt about when we'll be able to move freely, about our

- capacity to deal with it, and just maybe doubt about what God is up to at this time.
2. But right on cue for Low Sunday, we see Thomas. Or, rather, we don't see him. The other disciples were locked inside, afraid to go out. Thomas, perhaps, was the one designated to go out for essential supplies. While he's away, the risen Christ appears in their midst. Peace, he speaks. Jesus shows them the wounds still present in his flesh, proclaiming that the risen Christ is always also the crucified One. He breathes on them the Holy Spirit, the very breath of life, and commissions them to continue his work of forgiveness. Can you imagine? One minute they are cowering, fearing for their lives, while the next they find their lives given back to them as if for the first time, for now they know that death has no claim upon them. Most of all, though, Christ is risen. Present with them. Can you imagine?
 3. Thomas couldn't, and we might have a hard time, too, locked away in fear, beset by sin, stalked still by death. Thomas returns, and he doubts. Unless I see the Lord, he says, unless I can touch his wounds, why would I believe? Poor Thomas, forever nicknamed the Doubter, simply for having enough common sense to know that dead people stay dead and if you want to say otherwise, a little proof sure would be nice. Who wouldn't have reacted in just the same way? While his friends couldn't convince Thomas, Jesus could. And Jesus does. A week later, the Sunday after Easter, Jesus returns to his friends. Again he speaks peace. He does not shame Thomas, because Jesus knows that doubt does not mean the absence of faith. He gives Thomas exactly what Thomas needs to believe, and the disciple recognizes his Lord, his God.
 4. While Jesus willingly shows himself to Thomas, his visit ends with these words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." For the risen Christ will not tarry long on earth, not in this way. The time for

his ascension to will soon come, his disciples left to carry on the work. So how are we to believe without seeing? How are we to believe when we are locked at home? Quite simply, because Jesus still shows up.

5. As you know, three members of Grace have died in recent days. Beloved members named Wayne, Fern, and Sal. While we look forward to the day when we can gather at Grace for proper memorial services, some things need to be done in the meantime. So it was that I presided at the funeral for Sal this past Friday. Just ten people, masked and not too close together. We shared memories and heard God's Word. We prayed and shed tears. We heard Taps and saw a flag presented in honor of the young man, just seventeen, who enlisted in the Army in 1945. We drove to the cemetery for the committal and stood, in the April snow, as the casket was lowered into the ground. And that was the limit of our sight, but just the beginning of our faith. If not for Easter, our loved ones would live only in memory. A blessing, to be sure, but not one with much hope. If not for Easter, Wayne and Fern and Sal would be lost to us. If not for Easter, death would be the end of the story. But Christ is risen, and the story has changed forever. We shall see our loved ones, hidden now from our sight, in the Kingdom of God.
6. It is true that we don't get to see Jesus in the same way Thomas did. But while we don't get to see the body of Christ, we get to *be* the Body of Christ. Christ is alive in us, present for us, wherever we are. Yes, our body feels disconnected, but Jesus can't be kept out of our homes, our lives, by quarantine. Jesus shelters in place with us. Jesus, the crucified One, gives his body and blood as gifts of grace. We will one day gather together again and joyfully receive these gifts, but trust that the crucified, risen Christ is present with you now, with all the grace you need. In your doubts and in your fears, Jesus is present. Hold on to him. In your living and in your dying, Jesus is present. You can trust that the promise is true, for you. It doesn't matter if we can't quite see it. It's okay if doubt creeps in. It's still true, and Jesus is going

to keep showing up. The tomb couldn't hold him; death could not keep him laid low; the locked doors couldn't keep him away from his friends. They won't keep him away from you, either. Together in Christ, as the Body of Christ, we will not only get through this; we will emerge into the light of a new Easter day, continuing the work of Christ in this world. Speaking peace. Forgiving sins. Lifting this world from its lows. Proclaiming the truth of Easter, that Christ is alive and that in him you are alive, too. Alive and free for all the world to see. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

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