



## **The Second Sunday of Easter + John 20:19-31**

**"Just Believe" Pastor Nancy M. Raabe**

**Grace Lutheran Church [gracelutheranhatfield.org](http://gracelutheranhatfield.org)**

The phrase "just believe" does not appear in today's gospel, but it could have. We can imagine some of the disciples impatiently saying this to Thomas, after the other disciples tell him, "We have seen the Lord" and he says "Nope, not unless I see for myself that it's really him." Their response could have been:

"Oh, come ON, Thomas – this is just like all the times you weren't there for all those miracles and healings, and then you only believed us *after* you saw them healed. We wouldn't make this up, would we? Just believe!"

What does it mean to believe,

I was very gullible in my younger years. I pretty much believed whatever people told me. My thinking was, why would anyone pull my leg? What purpose is there in that? This made me the source of amusement at family dinners at the kids' table when my rowdy cousins would torment me with jokes whose punchline I didn't see coming until I had a mouthful of milk, and you can imagine what happened then. Or later during my graduate school years when the inventive son of my best friend would regale me with what turned out to be tall tales, my eyes opened wide in amazement until he finally said, "...not really!" and I would be embarrassed all over again.

What does it take to believe, especially to believe something as preposterous as Christ's resurrection from the dead, to which no earthly creature was a witness?

"Because the Bible says so" is not really enough. The Bible also says a lot of other things we properly understand as myth or metaphor, such as the six days of creation, or the plagues in Exodus, or the parting of the Red Sea. That does not mean these stories are not important for us to know. They are metaphors that carry a very real message. Where we get into trouble is when stories that are clearly metaphorical are interpreted as fact.

So why must we accept Jesus' resurrection as literal fact? Why can't we interpret it as a metaphor for renewal?

It is not only that everything we believe as Christians absolutely depends on it. It is not only that this conviction changes our entire understanding of how life and death operate – that life wins, that death no longer has any power over us, that the fear of death no longer makes us do or say crazy, selfish things that diminish others in the reckless effort to preserve our little fiefdom at all costs.

We must accept Jesus' resurrection as truth because you have seen the risen Christ—just as the disciples did, just as Thomas did.

- You have seen the risen Christ in the woman on their deathbed with glassy eyes, gripping your hand, mouthing Psalm 23 along with you and then – after a long pause – saying in the barest whisper, “I love you.”
- You have seen the risen Christ in the man you thought you were ministering to with offers of food, supplies and toiletries, only to hear him testify in soft-spoken words to a burning faith that ignites your own.
- You have seen the risen Christ in the mother whose pride and joy, a sparkling teenager beloved by all who you shepherded through Confirmation, is swept off the earth by an early morning car crash and who manages just two hours later to text you halfway across the country, so you would not hear it second-hand, “Ben died this morning.”
- You have seen the risen Christ in the face of the cashier who senses your high stress level, smiles at you with all the warmth of the sun, and says, “How are you doing today, sweetheart?” -- causing all your anxiety to melt away.
- You have seen the risen Christ in the homeless person you befriended who, as you prepare to move away, gives you his best blanket to remember him by, when you know how hard good blankets are to come by.

And notice also that it was not a healed body that Thomas witnessed, but a wounded body. For this is how the risen Christ continues to come to us – in the woundedness of lives scarred by suffering who appear to you, just as Jesus did to Thomas, just when your faith needs it the most. The dying. The poor. The grieving. The careworn. Those who have nothing by the world's standards, who give you everything through their affirmation of the living Christ.

This is how I came to faith many years ago—not through an epiphany or a vision or book-learning, but by closely observing people whose own faith was strong and unflinching especially in the face of adversity, and who embodied all the values of compassion and care for the least of these that define the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Upon them, I came to see his very face imprinted.

Amen.