

Second Sunday of Easter April 8, 2018

Year B – the Gospel of Mark

LUTHERAN

LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the
rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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<http://carolaround.com/2018/03/09/are-you-a-doubting-thomas/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 470/471 The Lutheran Hymnal 208

“O sons and daughters of the King”

hymnary.org refers to the author as “a Franciscan monk, Tisserand (who) founded an order for penitent women. He is also said to have written a worship service commemorating Franciscans martyred in Morocco in 1220.” Newadvent.org, a Catholic website, calls him “an eloquent preacher”. It also gives a great deal of details about the hymn itself, noting that “There are several translations into English verse by non-Catholics.”

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11221b.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEVqDBTphPw> Jean Tisserand, “Journeysongs, Third edition: Volume 12”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nsGK3YBLf0> A contemporary worship version. Josh Blakesley, “Spirit and Songs: Disc H”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX_ZuxvY7vU Piano version John Nilsen, “Above me”

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

Acts 4:32-35; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading (Next week, Acts 3:11-21; RCL, Acts 3:12-19)

“If you’ve been looking for a Sunday to teach or preach about stewardship, then April (8) is your lucky day. Look no further than the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles!

Did it just become more appealing to take another pass at Thomas and his need for a sign? If so, don’t hang your head in semi-shame; the description of how the early Christian community behaved is a tough text to tackle in our 21st century consumer culture. I urge you, however, to give Acts a go. Trust in the Spirit breathed upon those terrified and confused disciples huddled in the upper room. The same Spirit emboldens, enlivens and inspires your faith community today...”

<http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2012/04/impossible-dream-or-resurrection-reality/> The Rev. Sharron Riessinger Blezard is an ELCA pastor currently rostered in the Lower Susquehanna Synod.

They Had Everything in Common

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

“For the early church depicted in Acts, the resurrection of Christ is less a creedal article of individual faith and hope than a creative force of community formation and fellowship.

“According to our text summarizing the "state of the union" of the first believers in Jerusalem, the apostles had borne "testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," thereby mediating "great power (*dynamis*)" and "great grace (*charis*) ...upon ...all" who embraced their message (Acts 4:33)...

As in our own day, the early church worked out its resurrection faith through regular communal practices, such as baptism, the Eucharist, scripture study, and prayer. An earlier summary reports (following Peter's Pentecost sermon): "So those who welcomed his message were baptized... They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:41-42).

But they also engaged in a radical resurrection practice not so popular today: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and *no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common (koina)*" (4:32)... How did Christ's resurrection motivate such a unified, generous community? Or, conversely, how did the practice of communal goods inform the early church's understanding of the living Christ?..

Of course, however much we might admire the radical communitarian practice of the early Jerusalem church, we may also pity, even decry, their shortsighted, impractical economic vision. Quite possibly, it contributed to hard times down the line, requiring assistance (bailout) from the more prosperous congregation in Antioch (11:27-30).

Turns out they were in it for the long haul, or at least a longer haul than they expected. And the clock is now ticking well past the 2000-year mark. It is all too easy, then, for us not simply to pity the early church's practice, but to dismiss it altogether.

But we thereby also run the risk of dismissing their vibrant resurrection faith that ignited their extraordinary common-fellowship (*koinonia*) in the first place. And resurrection faith that does not profoundly shape communal practice lacks depth of meaning and breadth of appeal.

So, how shall we live out our faith in the risen Christ today?

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=294 **F. Scott Spencer**
Professor of New Testament and Preaching, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond,
Richmond, VA

Psalm 148; RCL, Psalm 133 (Psalm 4; RCL, the same reading)

“And Heav'n and Nature Sing

It's always been one of my favorite Christmas carols. How could you lose with this one? The words are by Isaac Watts and the tune, at least according to some hymnbooks, is by George F. Handel. The combination of words and music is just right. Notice that the melody runs straight down the D major scale! Though we've sung it countless times and have heard it each year in churches and shopping malls, it's possible that we have missed one important feature of this carol. Consider the words:

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room*

*and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.*

The lyricist is thinking big. All humans on earth are invited to welcome the Christ-King into their hearts. Then Isaac Watts ratchets the lyrics up another notch. He names two extremes to indicate the whole, asking heaven and also nature to join in singing this joyful song. To make sure that everybody gets the point, he repeats "heav'n and nature" three times, even having the tenors and basses echo it in a refrain. Once you've changed from a boy soprano or alto to a man tenor or bass, this becomes one of your favorite songs to sing at Christmas time!"...(continued after the reading)

Praise the Name of the LORD

148 **Praise** the LORD! (Hallelujah!)

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

² **Praise** him, all his angels;

praise him, all his hosts!

³ **Praise** him, sun and moon,

praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ **Praise** him, you highest heavens,

and you waters above the heavens!

⁵ Let them **praise** the name of the LORD!

For he commanded and they were created.

⁶ And he established them forever and ever;

he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.^[a]

⁷ **Praise** the LORD from the earth,

you great sea creatures and all deeps,

⁸ fire and hail, snow and mist,

stormy wind fulfilling his word!

⁹ Mountains and all hills,

fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ Beasts and all livestock,

creeping things and flying birds!

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,

princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹² Young men and maidens together,

old men and children!

¹³ Let them **praise** the name of the LORD,

for his name alone is exalted;

his majesty is above earth and heaven.
¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
 praise for all his saints,
 for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD! (Hallelujah!)

- a. [Psalm 148:6](#) *Or it shall not be transgressed*

“...But now to an unusual feature in Psalm 148 that I did not notice for a long time. It is the same feature already noted in "Joy to the World," namely the call for *non-human creatures*, that is, for nature to join in praising God. Professor Terry Fretheim has called attention to this theme in the entire Old Testament; see the helpful insights in Chapter 8 of his recent book, *God and the World*. [¹Terence Fretheim, *God and the World: a Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).]

The psalm begins by calling for praise "from the heavens" (1-6), continues with a call for praise "from the earth" (7-12), and concludes by tying "earth" and "heaven" together with a final call for all to join in the praises (13-14). It follows the typical pattern of the hymn with imperatives calling for praise (1-5,7,13-14), grounded by "for" clauses giving the reasons for praise (5b-6; 13b-14)...

Finally, the psalm says "O yes! And you humans are invited to join this praise band too!" The extremes are named to indicate the whole class: kings, princes and rulers, then young people, senior citizens, and children...

A sermon could be based on the "non-human praise of God" in this psalm, asking what it means for heaven *and nature* to sing. For example, "Earth and all Stars"* is a modern hymn calling on non-human elements (including test tubes!) to join the praise band (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 731). For a classic hymn, check out Francis of Assisi's "All Creatures, Worship God Most High!" which calls "brother wind," "sister water" and a whole list of non-human creatures to join in praise (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 835).

One can page through the "Praise and Thanksgiving" section of any hymnbook to find numerous examples of praise offered to God from non-human entities. We humans do not have a monopoly on praise. It appears that the often suspiciously regarded "praise band" could be moved from the basement to the main sanctuary, "loud clanging cymbals" (Psalm 150) and all!"

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=206 **James Limburg**
 Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

*This hymn became popular in Lutheran Day Schools. Learn a lot more from [Robert Morehead](#) about this hymn at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pl72s-DE1ng> Or you could just enjoy LSB 817 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2hP2DrUEIA> , "Expressions of Faith" Concordia University Wind Symphony, River Forest, Illinois
 (Editorial comment: when I went there it was Concordia Teachers College)

1 John 1:1-2:2; RCL, the same reading (1 John 3:1-7; RCL, the same reading)

“Good News, Bad News

This text plays nicely with this week's reading about Thomas and his desire to press his hands into the bloody wounds of Jesus.

It matters what our eyes have seen, what our ears have heard, what our hands and fingers have touched, because a flesh-and-blood world needs a flesh-and-blood savior.

Easter is a week behind us. The alleluias still ring in our ears, the joy of resurrection has been proclaimed through white lilies, soaring music, and maybe even a few leftover chocolate eggs and ham sandwiches. We have heard with our ears and seen with our eyes and touched with our hands this celebration of the empty tomb and a world forever changed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, however, our ears ring with the world's same old bad news. The joy of resurrection is flattened by political wrangling and the ongoing reality of home foreclosures and fruitless job searches, by despair and injustice and hearts broken open with jagged edges of grief. Is it not tempting to shut our eyes and our ears, to close our hands into fists of denial, to ignore those earthly realities?...

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1268 [Audrey West](#)
Adjunct Professor of New Testament, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, IL

The Word of Life

1 That **which*** was from the beginning, **which** we have heard, **which** we have seen with our eyes, **which** we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³ that **which** we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our^[a] joy may be complete.

Walking in the Light

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- a. [1 John 1:4](#) Some manuscripts *your*

Christ Our Advocate

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

“...We have meager evidence to support theories about what happened to the community that received this letter, but from the text it seems that some dissenters split off due to disagreements especially about the person of Jesus and the nature of the Christian life. These dissenters denied that Jesus was really human. They believed they followed the model of a spiritual Christ. As Christ is “heavenly,” sinless, and wise, so they thought they were as well.

The writer of 1 John (whom we will call “the Elder”) wrote this letter to “set the record straight,” so to speak, about these matters probably with the fear that current members of the community might split off to join the dissenters. What we have in 1 John, though, is not a polemic against these secessionists, but rather a positive appeal to readers to embrace the incarnate Christ and enter into fellowship with Father and Son...

Repeating the old, old story

According to Luke, when Paul went to Athens he was engaged in discussion by Greek philosophers who were interested in his message out of intellectual curiosity because they enjoyed spending time “telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Perhaps the dissenters of 1 John were also obsessed with new knowledge and special wisdom. And we too are often caught up in “new” -- new gadgets, new technology, new TV shows, new cars -- new, new, new! If the dissenters’ views resembled what would later be called Gnosticism, they hungered for exclusive, unique knowledge, a privilege for the special few. What makes the beginning of 1 John so clever is how John overturns this obsession with novelty. He opens by writing about Jesus, giving a testimony to the incarnation. But he does this slowly to unwrap his message delicately. Even though he is talking about a *who* (a person), he commences what “what” (in Greek, simply, *ho*)*.

What was from the beginning

What we have heard

What we have seen with our eyes

What we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life

We declare to you (1:1, 3b)

Jesus the Advocate

John spends much time in this epistle talking about sin. The dissenters apparently denied being sinful, so John reinforced the reality of human sin, even for believers (1 John 1:8)...

John reminds us of the problem of sin -- that it decays our life and pollutes our relationship with God. However, it would be taking the opposite extreme to believe sin is unconquerable. Confession (1 John 1:9) clears the pollution, and trust in Christ heals the decay (1 John 2:1-2). Much like the author of Hebrews, the Elder embraces the humanity of Jesus by

appeal to his sympathetic advocacy (see Hebrews 4:15). Sin must be recognized and dealt with, but Christ, who was touched in his body by the fallout of our sinfulness, bears on his skin the marks of finding a new way to be human. He is the perfect advocate in his divinity because he alone could defeat sin. He is the perfect advocate in his flesh because his humanity is indelible.”

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2429 **Nijay Gupta**

Assistant Professor of New Testament, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Ore.

*Strong's Concordance - hos, hé, ho: usually rel. *who, which, that*, also demonstrative this, that

Phonetic Spelling: (hos)

Short Definition: who, which, what, that

Definition: who, which, what, that.

<http://biblehub.com/greek/3739.htm>

***"Propitiation is the biblical doctrine embodying the concept that the death of Christ fully satisfied the demands of a righteous God in respect to judgment upon the sinner. The doctrine is not found with great frequency in the New Testament, the word *propitiation* appearing only three times in the Authorized Version ([Rom 3:25](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [4:10](#)) and four times in the American Standard Version ([Heb 2:17](#) added). One might be misled into the unwarranted assumption that this is a minor doctrine of the New Testament. A closer study, however, reveals four different Greek words related to this subject and a number of other passages where the idea is contained in the thought..." *The entire article goes into the subject with great detail.*

<https://bible.org/seriespage/10-propitiation> John F. Walvoord, long-time president of Dallas Theological Seminary

THE MARK CHALLENGE

Last week's Gospel was from the final chapter of Mark. How close are you?

"The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 20th Chapter"

John 20:19-31; RCL, the same reading (Luke 24:36-49; RCL, Luke 24:36b-48)

"...we know him as Thomas the Doubter.

But in truth, he is Thomas the Brave. And it is time to reclaim him.

Earlier in John's gospel, Thomas is the only disciple with the courage to follow Jesus, no matter the cost. Not Peter the Rock. Not John the Beloved. Not the Sons of Thunder. Not the Zealot.

When Jesus hears that his dear friend Lazarus has died, the other disciples try to talk him out of returning to Bethany to mourn. The last time they were all there all hell almost broke loose. They were threatened with death, run out of town, made to feel, in no uncertain terms, wholly unwelcome.

The disciples believed that returning to Bethany, even to mourn the dead, would end in the death of them all. So while the other disciples hem and haw about not going, Thomas alone speaks up.

Thomas alone stands in solidarity with Jesus.

“Let us go with him,” Thomas says, “so that we may die with him.”...

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/davidhenson/2012/04/the-unexpected-faith-of-doubting-thomas-2/#vy8W2dCveMpOJz7u.99> “David Henson... is ordained in the Episcopal Church as a priest.”

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,^[a] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, **“Peace be with you.”**²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”**²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”**

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin,^[b] was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you.”**²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, **“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”**²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- a. [John 20:19](#) Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time
- b. [John 20:24](#) Greek *Didymus*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

The story of Thomas has always been one of my favorites. Of course, it’s not just a story about Thomas. It’s also a story about frightened disciples. So scared, in fact, that, they hid behind locked doors. And who can blame them?... But when Jesus comes on the scene, their fear falls away and is replaced by joy.

This, I think, is the way we assume faith should work. Yes, perhaps you’ve got doubts and questions and fears, but then God arrives and those all fall away, replaced by joy and wonder and, of course, unshakeable faith.

But that's not the way it works with Thomas. He doubts. He questions. He disbelieves. He's not satisfied with second-hand reports and wants to see for himself. And again I would say, who can blame him? ...

So here's what I'm wondering a day or two after a joyous Easter service: do we make room for the Thomases in our world? Because I suspect that their number is legion, even among those who worshipped with us on Sunday and certainly among those with little or no familiarity with our congregation or faith.

Thomas does come to believe. He sees Jesus for himself. And after that experience he not only assents or consents to the witness of his comrades but makes the most profound confession of faith about Jesus contained in the New Testament, calling Jesus "my Lord and my God," bookending the confession in John 1 where the eternal word that becomes flesh is not only with God but is God.

But all of that comes after he has a chance to voice his doubt. And sometimes faith is like that – it needs the freedom of questions and doubt to really spring forth and take hold. Otherwise, faith might simply be confused with a repetition of creedal formulas, or giving your verbal consent to the faith statements of others. But true, vigorous, vibrant faith comes, I think, from the freedom to question, wonder, and doubt.

Not for everyone, of course. For some, faith comes more easily. Maybe many of the other disciples were like that (although let's not forget that they got to see what Thomas asked for!). But for others it's harder...

Indeed, I think that if we don't have any doubts we're probably not taking the story seriously enough. I mean, really – think about what we confess when we come together on Sundays: that the Creator of the vast cosmos not only knows we exist but cares deeply and passionately about our ups and downs, our hopes and dreams, and all the rest. This confession is, quite literally, in-credible (that is, not believable). And yet we come together and in hearing the Word and partaking of the Sacraments and by being joined to those around us through prayer and song, we come to believe...

Thomas comes to faith because he first has the chance to voice his doubt and questions and then experiences Jesus for himself. Perhaps the opportunity before us this week, Dear Partner, is provide the same opportunities for the many Thomases sitting in our pews..."

<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/03/easter-2-c-blessed-doubt/> David J. Lose was called as senior pastor of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis in 2017. From July 2014 to June 2017, he served as president of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.



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