

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter April 19, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

Thomas (remember from last Sunday) had fear and doubt. Yet even Thomas knew that all He needed from Jesus was His nail-pierced hands and spear-gashed side. He knew that Jesus died for him and that would remove his doubt and his fear. It's true also for you. Jesus removes your fear and gives you a more confident faith in its place. Today we hear from St. Peter, though, and it's starting to sound contradictory, if not just plain confusing when he writes something like this: "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1 Peter 1:17).

Why would this courageous leader among the apostles, speaking to newly-baptized infants in the faith, why would he tell them that they need to have fear? I thought that the good news of Easter was that there was no need for fear anymore! Why should a Christian's journey be one of fear, especially since we know Jesus our risen Lord and in Him we have no more reason to fear those things we used to fear? To be sure, fear isn't all of the story.

The Ten Commandments remind us that not only should we fear God, but also love and trust in Him above all things. As we read and hear the Gospels, we witness everything our merciful Savior did and said so that we may believe in Him through His Word. Yet the Gospels also have other people in the story. There are people who talk to Jesus, who respond to His Word, and we would miss out if we ignore them. These other people in the Gospels, like Thomas in the Gospel last week, are showing us pictures of

ourselves as we do our spiritual traveling in this world that is not our final home.

What happens with people when God breaks in, enters their world and their lives? Sometimes we see in the Bible's historical accounts the way things are supposed to be. Other times we see the opposite. Think about the detailed description of the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about seven miles away. It took place on the very day that Jesus had risen, many were overjoyed at this point, yet these two men were sad. This is not what we would think to be a good example of the church that proclaims the resurrection. They should be glad. They should rejoice. They had already been told by the others that Jesus had risen. But like Thomas, who wasn't in the room when the Lord appeared, these two men were not yet convinced.

That shows us a picture of ourselves. We're traveling on a journey in this world, we have been baptized and are clothed with Christ. We hear the preaching that Jesus is risen, and we respond He is risen indeed. But still we question. Can it really be? Is it possible? Could it be true that God took on flesh, died and rose on the third day? Even so, would it matter anymore? Does all this church-talk have any benefit for me today with all that I'm going through, two thousand years later?

As we learned from Thomas, part of the sinful baggage that we carry with us as we travel is that we doubt. We grow weary on the journey. We risk losing our hope. Sin threatens to tear us and those we love away

from Jesus. This is why St. Peter says in his epistle to pass the time of your exile journey here on earth in fear. The disciples would rather have had Jesus stay with them, keep on teaching and reassuring them, but Jesus told them in his last sermon to them in St. John's gospel that he had to go away for their sake, for their good. A little while, you will not see Me, and then again, after another little while, you will see Me.

Think of yourself walking down that Emmaus road. A Stranger catches up to you, and speaks something that is at one and the same time frightening and encouraging. Law that condemns you. Gospel that forgives and strengthens you. This is the journey of the church, until the Day when our Lord Jesus will return as He promised in glorified, visible form. This is the life that Christ wants for the church to live after He ascends to heaven and sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We cannot help but wonder, why did Jesus hide His true appearance from them as they walked on the road? If we look at the church and its life today, however we can give a good guess as to the reason.

They still don't recognize Him, yet Jesus nevertheless asks a few questions and then begins to turn the table as He preaches, all from the books of the Old Testament, remember, about the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. What a sermon, a Bible study, an education that must have been! When you hear God's Word in church and also read it from the Bible, that's when Jesus is catching up with you on your journey. He comes to you hidden, shrouded in the words you hear, but He's still there, ready to stay with you and walk with you. He has promised to be with us here today, and He most certainly is here! How often it is that when God's Word is preached,

though, we grow tired and restless. When the Gospel is read and we hear of Jesus in those words entering our ears, our slow hearts fail to see Him. Though we hear the proclamation that Jesus is risen, we still grow weary and dull even while we're hearing that joyful good news.

We have been given such a precious gift, yet we cannot seem to fully comprehend or appreciate what it means for us as we journey in Christian life today. It is for all sins, even our sins of weariness, that Jesus died. Jesus came to suffer and die so that we may have Him with us in these hidden ways, which are called means of grace. His death poured a never-ending flood of mercy for you into simple words, water, bread and wine.

The Easter story about the two men walking to the village of Emmaus tells us a lot about how Jesus loves us and helps us. Those two disciples arrive at their destination with this supposed "stranger," then they ask Him to come in with them and rest and have a meal. They thought they would serve Him, but instead, Jesus would end up serving them, giving them something that would greatly help them. Even though this is an ordinary meal, the words Luke wrote are the same words that are used to describe the Lord's Supper: "He took bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them." Sound familiar, right?

Just as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the upper room the night before his arrest, it is as though He is reminding them of this. "Do this in remembrance of me." He had said. The amazing thing is that their eyes were opened at the moment when He broke bread and then they saw Jesus. They even told the eleven disciples (including Thomas,

too, we would suppose) that Jesus was “known to them in the breaking of bread.” This is an important detail for us to keep in our minds with this Gospel story. It’s important because we know Jesus not by something that we feel or by some truth or principle that we tell ourselves in our minds. We know Jesus when He actually comes to us and opens our minds to understand Him, to hear His Word that forgives your sins, and to eat and drink His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. In your journey, here is where Jesus walks with you, not in your mind nor is it something you will always feel in your heart. He comes to us. He is not far away. We should be here in God’s house often so we can meet Him!

Jesus took two sad, confused, and worried men and gave them the gospel Word--He gave them Himself. They knew all the facts about what happened to Jesus. They said it back to Him accurately when this Stranger asked them what things happened in Jerusalem. But they needed Jesus to help them see, from the Bible and from His teaching from the Bible, that yes, as they had hoped, Jesus did redeem Israel, He did pay the price for your salvation to come true. He gives you the forgiveness that you know you didn’t deserve, and the eternal life that for you had been impossible to achieve. Like those two men walking to Emmaus, God’s Word opened up to you what Jesus did for you, and He makes it clear what the whole point of your journey is—it’s to be with Him.

The whole church is on a journey. Jesus is going with us, and you’ll hear Him and receive His gifts and forgiveness. This is how you know His love is for certain. Jesus takes away our sins, our sorrows and worries, right now at this moment, and gives

Himself to us. Peter reminds us in his epistle that the Word of the Lord endures forever. Yes, He does! Jesus is our victor over death because He didn’t stay dead. His victory is our victory, and when we drink the Communion cup we see Jesus. He said it’s His blood, so that’s what it is. Our eyes are opened unto Him in the bread that we eat, since He has already said, it is His body. We eat and drink and we receive Jesus; His love; His forgiveness.

He is making the journey with us, ever abiding and leading us. We still conduct our lives, and as Peter wrote we proceed in this earthly land of exile with fear, yes, there is a new kind of fear that is thankful and reverent to our Lord who loves us, but since we have Christ walking with us all the way, we need never be fearful. When the road we walk seems dark and sometimes without direction, it is Jesus who forgives us and helps us. He journeys with us through the Word that He is, through the Word that we hear in faith, even when we do not always detect that He is there. He cares for and nurtures His church along the road, as the psalm says: “For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Psalm 18:28).

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.