

Second Sunday of Easter  
May 1, 2011  
Reverend Julio Cruz-Natal, Pastor  
Emanuel Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dallas, Texas, USA

*Scriptures: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31*

### **Now What?**

We may have the temptation to criticize Thomas for being “such an unbeliever.” How come we would not believe after so much that has happened? Jesus lived, taught about the kingdom of God coming near, did miracles—even raised Lazarus from the tomb. He told his disciples that he would die and resurrect. Which had come to happen according to the testimony of those that were there to see him nailed to the cross and later saw him alive. The women and the disciples gave testimony of such events. What else could Thomas want? Why would he not just believe?

But you know, if we stop to think about it, there might be some reasoning for this to happen. The women had the chance to encounter Jesus. The disciples saw him right in the midst of them. Those walking to Emmaus talked with him and even some others had breakfast with him one morning at the lakeshore. They all saw him, talked with him, ate with him. And Thomas, maybe out of misfortune, or simply for not being in the right place at the right time, missed out on the opportunity. And now he just seems to be asking for the same chance so many others had. He wants to have the same experience. He wants to go through the fear and the joy, the nervousness and the peace of seeing Jesus alive.

In fact, isn't that why we come and enjoy so much the Easter Sunday service? Don't we come to share in that experience of rejoicing and happiness? The sanctuary is decorated with beautiful flowers. The music is joyful and upbeat. We clap, dance, sing alleluia and proclaim to the top of our lungs, “The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” We come enjoy that. We come to participate of the joyful celebration. We come to have the experience by which we affirm that the church, like Jesus, is alive. That's why we show up, isn't it? But what if we miss out? What if for whatever reason we are not there for that liturgical event? Do you feel sorry for missing it? “Darn, I wish I had been there.” Maybe you become doubtful, like Thomas. “Oh well, it probably wasn't that good after all.” Or maybe you wish it would happen again. “Can we have a second Easter service?”

Among the many good things that happened this weekend during our Synod Assembly, one of the most exciting is that we got enjoy three different Easter services. Three of our churches, King of Glory, Santa Maria de Guadalupe and Calvary brought to the assembly their respective worships from Easter Sunday. Those at the assembly had the opportunity to enjoy different flavors and different ways of adoration. The music, the choirs, the sermons... It was all wonderful. Everybody was animated, joyful and enthusiastic. We all had the chance to celebrate Easter all over again.

But here's my question: what happens afterwards? When the brass ensembles are gone, when the choir is taking a break, when the flowers are removed, when we don't have as many gathered in the sanctuary. . . . When all the beautifully and painstakingly prepared services are over, what do we do? Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, we proclaimed ourselves

to be the church of the resurrection, the people that find meaning and significance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are alive because Christ is alive. So today, on the so-called low Sunday, are we still all that? Is God still victorious over death? Do we still proclaim with the same enthusiasm and conviction “The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”?

To erase any doubts, let me be clear. The answer to those questions is a resounding, yes! These things don't depend on what we think or believe. Jesus is risen and he is victorious over death because of the power of God. These questions are not a challenge to God, but a challenge to ourselves. After all the beautiful and awesome worship experiences of the resurrection service are gone, do we still believe what we have said before?

My brothers and sisters, I don't think Thomas is asking for too much. He just wanted to be part of the whole thing like so many others had already done. He just happened to not be there when he had to be. Which, by the way, in itself is a pretty powerful message, isn't it? If we are not there—or here—we may just miss out. Which reminds me of the call in the gospel to be always ready, since we don't know the time or the place when the Lords is going to show up. If anything at all, maybe Thomas just needed a little bit of encouragement. And then again, isn't that our case too? Thomas was not scolded or harshly criticized by Jesus. He is instead invited to have peace, to be joyful, to have faith, to believe. Even if it was difficult for him to believe, his doubts were handled well within the love and grace of God already displayed in the cross. Thomas wants to see and Jesus, ever so compassionate, shows up one more time. He offers his body, wounded but alive, to Thomas. “Put your finger in my hand. Bring up your hand to my side.” Thomas is not rejected; he is loved. Thomas is not cast out; he is welcome to be in relationship with the risen Christ.

Instead of chastising Thomas for wanting to see, here's a more important question. One that applies to Thomas and to each one of us: Are we going to continue to believe in the risen Christ? He has shown us his wounds: the open side, the nailed hands, the thorn-pierced head. What are we going to do with that? How does it change the way we live? Last week, as part of our Easter service, we did a remembrance of our baptisms. It was way for us to remember where we have come from. Well, with that we also need to remember that our baptism is not an event that happened once. Baptism is a process that goes with us all our lives. As we grow, as we learn, as we know more of what God has done, we commit ourselves to carry on our discipleship. Throughout life, from the day we were born, until the day we rest in the Lord, we have made a commitment to follow and believe and proclaim the life we gain by Christ death and resurrection. We remember our baptism not only as a way to remember our place of birth, but also to remember our call to be followers of the risen Christ.

Today, as it was last Sunday, Christ is risen. And today, maybe with even more urgency than last week, we are called to carry on that faith. Jesus is inviting us. The risen Christ is sending us. What are we going to do? May God inspire to continue responding with the same energy and enthusiasm always. Amen.