



SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year A

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Gathering

(An unlit white or yellow candle, a bible open to this week's gospel and some fresh flowers rest a table covered with a white cloth.)

This week we join the apostles in a locked room and experience both their confusion and fear following the death of their leader, and their joy and relief when the risen Lord appears to them. We stand also with Thomas as he seeks assurance that the Lord is risen. Last week, we began the fifty days of Easter celebration. The Lord is risen indeed. How did the transforming power of resurrection hope inspire your life this past week?

Prayer

The candle is lit. Members are invited to rest in the presence of the risen Lord. After a time of quiet, The leader and three group members lead the community in prayer as follows.)

Leader: For challenging the doubt in me, receiving the Thomas in me and allowing me those graceful times when I, too, can put my fingers into the signs and wounds of my

everyday life and there come in contact with you . . .

All: Praise to you, risen Redeemer.

I: For meeting me in the garden of my life, calling my name and allowing me to feel loved, blessed and cherished...

All: Praise to you, risen Lord.

II: For walking with me on my Emmaus journeys, coaxing the ache out of me, comforting and strengthening me with your intimate presence...

All: Praise to you, risen Jesus.

III: For surprising me on the sandy beaches of my so often planned and programmed life, inviting me to come and taste what you have prepared . . .

All: Praise to you, risen Savior.

All: Lord, from our times of doubt and uncertainty, help us to forge a faith that is authentic and strong. You nourish us time after time with all that we need to carry your risen presence with us wherever we go, and to share your truth with those we meet along the way. Give us the courage to seek you in our doubt and the strength to proclaim you in faith. For this we pray in your name. Amen.

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(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites

members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

We all know skeptics, people who are proud to shower doubt on the validity of commonly-held beliefs. But then, there are also the ignorant or naïve types who are willing to believe in the truth of something without the benefit of hard evidence. The penchant for doubt and the desire to believe are just part of who we are.

This week we encounter Thomas caught between belief and doubt. Because of his reluctance to accept the resurrection of Jesus on the report of a few ordinary fishermen, the apostle Thomas has carried the stigma of *doubter* for centuries.

But was he alone in questioning? This gospel narrative tells us that the apostles had sealed themselves in an upstairs room, even though they had already received word from Mary Magdalene that she had personally encountered the risen Lord. They were afraid of the Jews, we are told, but might it be that they also had misgivings about Mary’s testimony? If so, were they so different from Thomas in his doubt?

Thomas is an appealing character to those of us who tend to be skeptical. He asks the hard questions, questions we ourselves might ask if we had the courage. Like us, Thomas wants to believe – he’s not an obstructionist or a half-hearted disciple – but he needs to experience for himself this new reality that defies all reason. His desire is so strong that he is willing to be on the *outside* or stand at the *edge* in order to discover his own place in this new community of believers. What are the implications for us here? Do we sometimes settle for conventional practice or belief rather than challenge ourselves to move deeper in our faith, risking the uncertainty that may greet

us outside of our comfort zone?

By asserting his need to see the risen Jesus for himself, Thomas opens a path for us to be *searchers* in our own faith. Our belief can in fact grow stronger when we allow our doubts to surface, and trust that just Jesus will not abandon us, but will seek us out in our darkness, just as he returned for Thomas. Being *doubt-full* is neither comfortable nor convenient, but facing our doubts allows us ultimately to embrace our beliefs in a more authentic and *faith-full* way.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Describe a time when you experienced a period of doubt or uncertainty that made you unable to receive Jesus' greeting, "Peace be with you". What or who helped you through this difficult time?
- ◆ With whom do you identify most closely in this gospel story and the surrounding narrative – the women at the empty tomb, the apostles in the locked room, or Thomas? Why?
- ◆ How do you relate to those who experience doubt or disbelief? How might you respond in a way that could be helpful?
- ◆ How have you stayed faithful when life has thrown obstacles, darkness, doubt and fear in your way?
- ◆ When have you experienced Christ's peace in the midst of a time of doubt or fear?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Invite someone you know who has fallen away from the church or who has lost his/her faith to share his/her story. Listen with an open mind,

and share some of your own struggles and how it is you stay faith-full.

- ◆ Set aside ten minutes a day this week for reflection and prayer. Pray each day for a friend or family member whose doubts or negative experiences have caused them to give up on the church or faith.
- ◆ Learn more about spiritual direction, and reflect on how it might be helpful in your own spiritual journey. Your diocesan office or a retreat house in your area will serve as a resource for connecting you with a spiritual director, someone who can serve as a companion on the journey toward God.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, two members of the community pray as follows on behalf of all.)

Prayer for a Questioning Heart

- I: It seems to me Lord
 that we search
 much too desperately
 for answers
 when a good question
 holds as much grace
 as an answer.
- II: Jesus
 you are the Great Questioner

Keep our questions alive
that we may always be seeker
rather than settler .

I: Guard us well
from the sin of settling in
with our answers
hugged to our breasts.

II: Make of us
a wondering
far-ighted
questioning
rattle people
And give us the feet of pilgrims
on this journey unfinished.

All: Amen.

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(Members join in singing, "Sing of the Lord's Goodness." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, members exchange a sign of Easter peace.)

