

Sunday April 24, 2022  
First Lesson: Psalm 150  
Gospel Lesson: John 20: 19-31  
Sermon Series: Resurrection Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie Jeanette Engel

**We are in our second week of the Resurrection Effect, a sermon series that is designed for us to explore the significance of the tomb being empty and to further examine the meaning of Christ's Resurrection for our lives today.**

- And I have to tell you, I am still basking from the glow of Holy Week leading up to Easter morning for our Church community.
- For the music was moving, the readings were powerful and came alive for many of us I have been told;
- Mainly because we had different voices from the congregation involved, all bringing their own voice to the story of Jesus betrayal and crucifixion experience.

- I am still in awe of our Easter celebration of having 6 new members join our church, one adult baptism; not to mention witnessing Sara and Tina together singing on Easter morning preceding Sara's baptism, was just so special to witness;
- Then I learned that we have 17 children interested in attending summer camp;
- Furthermore, the choir and other groups in our Church, have come together to raise money for these children to go to camp.
- Finally, my husband and family are driving to Orlando, Florida in a few days to stay in a family owned timeshare.
- We originally had prepaid hotel reservations for our second day of travel in Macon, Georgia.
- However, when one of our lifelong members Evelyn Stewart, heard that we would be driving in one of my sermons that I shared earlier, she lovingly insisted that we stay with her daughter Jeanette in

Atlanta, Georgia instead, whom I connected with right away when she was in Lincoln.

- We have a lot in common, not to mention Jeanette's first name is my middle name...so there is that!
- However, to be honest, my first thought when Evelyn extended this invitation to me was, "Oh she is probably just being nice, but doesn't really mean it!"
- For in all of the Churches that I have served and been a part of, I cannot recall receiving such a level of hospitality!
- However, as many of you may have surmised, Evelyn indeed meant the invitation, for I received a call personally from her, in which she ensured that Jeanette and I had each other's contact information.

- Consequently, I have officially cancelled our hotel in Macon, in which we received a full refund of over \$300.00!
- Not to mention, Jeanette has also checked in with us to see if we have any dietary restrictions and you know what that means....**folks she is going to feed all of us too!**
- And I'll say it again, **it is seldom to receive** this type of love from someone outside of my immediate family;
- **That kind of love** where someone does something for you just because they want to;
- **That kind of love** where you don't even ask for a need, **they just provide you with the need;**
- **That kind of love** that requires a person to go out of their way, and they don't even see it as an inconvenience;
- Church family, all of these instances and more that I have named, Holy Week, the six new members,

Sara's baptism and the duet of Sara and Tina, the Church rallying together to send 17 children to camp, Evelyn and Jeanette's radical hospitality to ensure that my family is loved on and taken care of and now, Confirmation Sunday today of welcoming four more professed members to our worship community—**all of this and more is proof that the tomb is empty!**

- **All of this and more** is proof that the resurrection of Christ and more is very much real and very much relevant to our lives today;
- **All of this and more** is where our psalm this morning is stemming from;
- **This awareness that you and I** are loved and lovable;
- **This awareness** that even in the darkest valley of our lives, that death is not the final say, life is the only option;

- **This awareness that you and I** could mean so much to our Creator, where God as both fully human and fully divine would walk this Earth with us and willingly experience what we experience;
- To know that **This God would** willingly dine and recline with us; to know that **this God would** intentionally choose to be with us in the lowest of our lows; in fact **this God would choose** not to leave us even though He could have; even though in some instances perhaps **he should have left us**, because of our free willful actions to not always love one another;
- **To know that this God** would advocate for us to have one more chance;
- **To know that this God** in his exchange with Peter in Matthew 18:21-22, would forgive you and I **not just 7 times, but 77 times**...which really means indefinitely;

- **It is no wonder** how Mary could praise Jesus with her alabaster jar;
- **It is no wonder** how David could have danced in 2 Samuel 6: 14, the way that he did;
- **It is no wonder** how our psalmist this morning could proclaim today;

*Praise the Lord!*

*Praise God in the sanctuary;*

*Praise God in the mighty heaven;*

*Praise God for God's mighty works;*

*Praise God's unequalled greatness!*

- Oh I wish I could have some help this morning and get like 15 people to put their hands together and give our Lord a hand clap of praise for **Christ is risen...Christ is risen today and always!**
- Switching gears just a bit, I feel called to also address the reality in that all that we have just celebrated, I realize that some of us in the

sanctuary and watching online may not be in this same space of celebration;

- **Yes some of us** I would imagine, are excited with all that is going on in the Church;
- **Yes some of us may** even joy being a part of this community, for **we can feel** the love;
- **We can feel** the energy,
- **We can feel** the synergy;
- **Some of us may can even** feel a stirring to become more active in this momentum that we have going on here at First UMC of Lincoln,
- Furthermore as a quick side note, this is why I formally invite you this afternoon at 12:30 for the Leaders Summit brunch;
- For this is a gathering of all leaders and prospective leaders who are interested in gaining more tools in our work, so that we can serve in our most healthiest capacity together;



- However getting back to our gospel, **some of us** still may not have a response to the empty tomb just yet, that would reflect celebration;
- **Some of us may not** have a response, simply because we are still trying to discern what it means for our lives if it means anything at all;
- **Some of us** may still be processing our own embedded theologies and ecclesiologies, that may have instilled some level of doubt within our spiritual journeys.
- For as I bring in the new Gallup poll findings, that revealed how Americans' membership in houses of worship continued to decline last year, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend;
- This staggering statistic, highlights to us that there are a lot of people wrestling with some aspect of religion and the Bible;

- **For whether the people** are drawn to Jesus and not so much the idea of organized religion;
- **Or whether the people** simply are not certain if there is a God who exists among us;
- Either way, why I love our gospel so much is that it is real, it is honest, it is even prophetic to where our society and culture is today;
- Furthermore, what better way to look at doubt, than through the eyes of disciple Thomas in our gospel today, who did not entirely believe initially that Jesus' resurrection occurred.
- So essentially church family, last week when I was inviting you and I to consider our response to the empty tomb; Thomas's response to all of this was **doubt.**

- **Thomas in verse 25 of the latter portion of this scriptural sentence said in my NRSV translation; that “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”**
- And I don't know about you, but out of all of the biblical characters that I have ever engaged within the Holy scriptures, this is probably the most relatable disciple for me...**the one who has expressed doubt.**
- For in these trying times, I have found myself oscillating between a measure of strong faith and doubt; day to day; sometimes even hour to hour.
- I have found myself crying out of frustration in one instance, to be followed by a wave of assurance in the next.
- One of our members in our Wednesday applying the sermon to life class for instance, expressed

how she felt as if her faith had been deconstructed altogether— down to essentially nothing;

- Thereby raising the question within her, if a person is in a place where they cannot even rely on whether or not the Bible is completely true, then how can one believe if any of it is true?
- And I have to say that I love that she felt comfortable in sharing this with our group, because again, I feel that many of us can relate to what she is saying.
- This level of doubt I would imagine has entered a lot of our minds and is nothing to be ashamed of in my book.
- **For doubt** from my perspective is not suggesting that you and I are not strong in our faith;
- On the contrary **doubt for me** is a sign that you and I are **still growing and learning in our faith.**
- So I stopped by to say that **having doubt** is a normal part of our Christian journey.

- Furthermore, having doubt does not mean that you and I are a bad disciple; on the contrary it signals to God that we are in a place in our journey, where we are ready to explore a deeper relationship with God;
- A relationship that perhaps will allow us to explore further the wounds on his wrists, and learn more about God's passion;
- A deeper relationship that invites us to examine closer the marks on Christ's side, thereby allowing us to learn more about God's mission;
- You see Church through our doubt, this begins to make the space for the Imago Dei within each and every one of us to come on out, from the depths of whatever had been enclosing the light of God within us;

- For before, I would imagine there was a time where most of us was not really thinking about the world from the vantage point of Jesus;
- You and I on the contrary, have just been living our day to day lives.
- For the scripture of Matthew 6 informs us what most, if not all of us are concerned about where it says, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[j] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”
- You see Church, **most of us** in our day to day lives — this is what we tend to be concerned about; **our daily needs and having those needs met;**
- **Most of us** are concerned about our tasks list and everyday responsibilities of keeping a roof over our heads, clothes on our backs and food inside of our bellies— **and if we are blessed enough** to have

the time and extra resources, **perhaps we can** take a vacation here and there;

- If we are fortunate enough to have just a few extra moments in the busyness of our day, **perhaps we can** grab a coffee and chat here and there;
- If we are productive enough in completing some of our tasks, **perhaps we can** come together and break bread together here and there;
- However, the bigger stuff, **we tend to leave** it to those, who in our eyes we have deemed are called to worry about that type of stuff;
- **We tend to leave** the sorting out of preaching the good news, binding up the brokenhearted, setting the captives and oppressed free and helping the blind to see, **to the ones who are called to do so**;
- Or in the disciples case, they would **leave it up to the Savior to do so**;
- So again, why I am celebrating Thomas today is that **through his doubt**, it allowed him to step

away from his own concerns, to learn more about God's concerns;

- **Through Thomas's curiosity**, it allowed him to step away from his own daily demands, to inquire more about the greatest command; to love God and love one another;
- **As I reimagine Thomas's interaction a little more closely with Jesus**;
- Him seeing those wounds with his very own eyes, allowed him to see as Jesus sees;
- Him having the opportunity to touch Jesus' wounds, gave Thomas the opportunity to really see the world in all of its brokenness and brilliance, and Thomas's response to it all we see is in verse 28; **"My Lord and My God!"**
- Sort of like when I really began to see some of the issues of our queer siblings in Christ, who have in many ways been discriminated against just as



much as black and brown people are discriminated against...my response was **My Lord and My God;**

- Or the first time discovering how a war in one part of the country; how much it really impacts where you and I live today...this awareness led me to proclaim **My Lord and My God;**
- Or discovering how long a pandemic in one part of the world can ravage the entire world....again my awareness of it all opens up my heart to say **My Lord and My God...**
- Or learning the need for restorative justice and why the rate of recidivism in the prisons is so high....I can't help but say....**My Lord and My God;**
- You see Church, it was through Thomas's doubt, that leads in all of us some questions;
- **Questions of why** the captives are still not free;
- **Questions of why** there are people who have been rejected;

- Which then allows our questions to lead to some answers;
- **Answers that would suggest** that of course God would not accept that for instance, women are to be seen and not heard;
- **Answers that would suggest** that of course God, would not be ok with Black and Brown people having to enter through any back door ever;
- Where it is in these answers being accepted within our spirits, that invites the Imago Dei that resides in each and every one of us to respond;
- **My Lord and my God meaning**, you and I are invited to respond in a way, that invites us to play an active role in righting the wrongs;
- **My Lord and my God meaning....**
- You and I are encouraged to respond in a collective manner, that encourages us to keep pressing on, until thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as is in heaven;

- **My Lord and my God!**
- Therefore, it is in us all coming together in this newfound awareness; through our synchronized declarations that calls out to the heavens.... **My Lord and My God!**
- This is when doubt my friends... has done good work!
- This is when Verse 29 of our gospel comes alive for us, where Jesus said , **Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed** (v. 29).
- Or another way of Jesus saying this today would be; **Blessed are those who read the story of Thomas and thereby believe in Me;**
- **My Lord and My God... the Tomb is empty and our hearts are full, for Christ is Risen...Christ is Risen indeed...Today and forevermore!**