

Easter IV

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- [0 : 00] Every year on the second Sunday after Easter, we read the account of John chapter 20. And in John chapter 20, we hear of our Lord's appearance to that disciple, Thomas. The story recalls how our Lord appeared to the disciples, but Thomas was not present with them. Thomas, therefore, did not see the risen Christ at first. It was only then after eight days that Thomas saw and he touched the risen Christ. He then confessed the truth about Jesus by confessing my Lord and my God. Jesus then responds to Thomas by saying, you have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Now, poor old Thomas often becomes the whipping boy for preachers for a lack of faith.
- [1 : 14] But if we really think about it and if we are really honest with ourselves, I think we would have to admit that we are all a lot like Thomas. Quite often when we pray, we feel like we're having a conversation with ourselves. When we talk about our Lord, we often ponder if we believe in some type of phantom or mythical figure. I know you're not supposed to say this out loud, but we all think it. And living in this world, we often wonder if we are robbing ourselves of the excitement and fun that seems to be apparent from living as if there is no God at all. Well, if there's one big idea I would like to impart to you this morning, it is simply this. To be a Christian is to be one governed by faith. Let me say that again. To be a Christian is to be a person governed by faith. That seems like an elementary approach to Christianity, and that's because it is.
- [2 : 28] The Christian faith is not about trying to be obscure. It's pretty plain and simple. Now, the definition of faith is given to us in the book of Hebrews, which we read this past week in morning prayer. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, which states, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. In other words, faith means trusting. Trusting in that which is not always tangible to the eye or even to our own experience. Trusting in that which is not always tangible to the eye or even to our own experience. In other words, the Christian faith is simply about trust. It is about trust. It's what we just said in the creed. I believe in God. But we as Americans, oftentimes living in our modernist world, believe that only experience or empirical evidence is absolutely vital for knowledge.
- [3 : 50] Which is really absurd. But faith calls us to believe without having all the answers based upon our own experience.

In other words, the Christian faith, again, is about trust. And your perceived lack of experience of the divine is not a disadvantage.

It's actually an advantage. Because as our Lord said to Thomas, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Or as Jesus said many times, A wicked and perverse generation demands signs. Here in our gospel text of John chapter 16, We heard how Jesus tells his disciples that he will be departing them.

He will be taking his rightful place as the conqueror over death and the grave. While transforming our mortal flesh into immortality. As he takes our mortality into heaven.

[5 : 02] And now imparts to us his immortality. So that we participate in eternity in the here and now. And our Lord promises that we will reign with him for all eternity.

And that reign started at his ascension. The disciples are shocked. They're mortified to hear such news.

What does Jesus mean? When he says that he's going to be leaving them. Jesus says, But because I have said these things to you, Sorrow has filled your heart.

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, The helper will not come to you.

But if I depart, I will send him to you. Our Lord promises that another will come.

[6 : 05] Who is called the helper. The helper is the Holy Spirit. The paraclete. And our Lord goes on to say, However, However, When he, That is the spirit of truth, Has come, He will guide you into all truth.

For he will not speak on his own authority. But whatever he hears, He will speak. And he will tell you the things to come. He will glorify me. For he will take what is mine.

And declare it to you. That's the role of the Holy Spirit. In other words, The spirit of truth will be with his disciples.

And with us. And he is with us. Now this does not happen by, Again, Some kind of mystical experience.

That Jesus comforts his disciples. That he is not abandoning them. And he is not abandoning you.

[7 : 13] What our Lord says is that the Holy Spirit, Whatever he hears, He will speak. And he will tell you the things that is to come.

Friends, The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ known. To make him present. Right here. Right now. And again, This does not happen.

By mystical experiences. Although that can happen. But that is not the normative. Nor should we be seeking after such experiences. Because then our faith becomes all about experiences.

Rather than about Christ. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to put us into a state of ecstasy. Or some type of religious trance.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit. Again, It is to make Christ known. And to make Jesus present. In order to guide us throughout our lives.

[8 : 21] Christ. So the question is, How does he make Christ present? The way Christ is made known and present to us.

Comes first of all by hearing. And responding to the word of God. It is not just hearing. What the word says. But acting in faith.

And in obedience. And responding to that. Christ is also known as we receive. That water of life. In holy baptism. That washes and cleanses us.

And we are to remember who we are. Our identity as baptized Christians. That's why we make the sign of the cross. Christ is made known as the Spirit transforms bread and wine.

To be the immortal body and blood of Jesus. And Christ is made known to us by hearing the words of absolution and forgiveness.

[9 : 22] So that we are reconciled with God. And we are reconciled with one another. Friends, most of us do not have some sensational or mystical experience of our Lord in this life.

And you shouldn't be discouraged. You should not be discouraged by not having such an encounter as Thomas had. Because Thomas was reprimanded.

You are not less of a Christian. Or somehow lacking something. Faith means trusting in God even though we do not see or touch.

But again, the Holy Spirit makes Christ known. And present to us in the here and now. And he does it through ordinary water.

Ordinary bread. Ordinary wine. And fallible priests, bishops. In other words, the Spirit comes to us in the sacraments.

[10 : 38] And we are to continue putting our trust in Christ. As we partake of these signs and seals.

Knowing that one day our faith will be made sight. But until that time, may we be the blessed. The blessed ones by God.

By living a life of faith. A life of trust. Knowing that such trust and belief is the way of truth. Because it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

And such faithfulness will one day be rewarded by God beyond all human comprehension or measure. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.