

Easter 2 C

Acts 5:27-32

Psalms 118:14-29

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

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Grace and peace to you from the risen Christ. Amen.

Thank God for Thomas today! His reaction to the tall tale of resurrection is just so human! While we celebrated Easter last week – it doesn't take very long before we begin to wonder about it and ask questions. Be encouraged to do so! Asking questions is a great way to learn! So, this week I've been asking people at Bible study and on Facebook about their questions around Easter. Now, I don't have all the answers, but I have to say that I have been really impressed with the questions people are asking. This morning I'll share some of them with you.

Question: Why did Jesus come when he did? There's so many more people in the world today who might believe if they had the chance to see him.

Well, the short answer is: who knows about God's timing. We've heard it said that God's timing is perfect – which I think we'd like to argue with that at times. At seminary we learned about God coming in particular moments and in specific ways – like to Moses in a burning bush, or Mary as a young woman. God however, is also “in, with, and under” all things all the time as Martin Luther is credited with describing.

We may not know why God chose to send Jesus 2000 years ago, but what we do know is that Christ continues to live through us. Interestingly, in this passage from John we heard how that happens: Jesus breathed on his followers and they received the Spirit (v.22.) This Spirit is the living Christ in you and I. And that Spirit asks and enables us to be the particular in our own time. Hence we so often say we are the hands and feet of Christ. Jesus lives! And we are part of that life.

Question: To be saved, we have to believe in Christ. Right?

So this is a tricky one. Asking the question immediately means we are beginning to create divisions. And yes, there are passages that seem to indicate this.

Generally speaking, whenever a biblical text makes us feel fearful or anxious, I'd say we're not reading it properly. The Bible is God's good news for us! We have more than adequate access to words of hate and judgment; God came to bring in a new way of living, a “new Jerusalem” as is later described in Revelation.

What appears here to be a “chicken and egg” question (which comes first, belief or being saved?) really isn't. In the Lutheran church we say the most

important thing is what God has already done. God sent himself as Jesus into our lives, he died and rose to effect a new way of living unhindered by rules and regulations. In effect all of those things we say we "should" do, like giving, going to church, confessing, reading the Bible or anything else that we might imagine makes us a "good" Christian, doesn't actually get us anywhere. Only God does, through what happened in Christ.

All those other things then, are rightly our *response* to this wonderful news! But we are never saved by what we do; only by what Christ has already done. That's why Luther said faith is a gift.

In addition, there is more than one way to be "saved." When the early church began to debate whether the Jewish people were still in God's favor, because they didn't accept Christ, Paul said (Romans 11:1-2): *I ask, then, has God rejected the chosen people? Of course not! I myself am an Israelite, descended from Sarah and Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. No, God has not rejected the chosen people, who were foreknown long ago.*

So, let's not worry about who's in and who's not. Let's not worry if we've got all our t's crossed and i's dotted. Let's just know that we're good with God and get to the work of loving others. God is bigger than our rules or our imagination and we have been liberated from the burden of such decisions.

Question: John said "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Jn 20:29) Wouldn't it be easier for us to believe if we could see?

Belief is never a given. Think back to the stories of Jesus' followers and how often they messed things up. When Jesus said he was going to go to Jerusalem to die, Peter immediately said "not on my watch!" When Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven the disciples argued about who would sit beside him.

By the time John wrote these words (about 80 years after Jesus died) there was already a lot of people who wondered if their faith would be stronger if they could see Jesus. But of course that just wasn't possible, which is the same for us. John gives them this beautiful blessing of encouragement saying that belief is no more or less powerful more or less valid because of when we live. Some have seen some have not - there is more than one way to come to believe.

Question: How can we know that the story of Jesus actually happened?

There is much archaeological evidence that supports many of the Bible's stories and events. If you're looking for absolute proof that might be counted as un-refutable evidence however, you're out of luck.

For example they've found what matches the description of the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a paralyzed man. Interestingly it was discovered beneath an old church - churches were often built over or near such important sites.

"I don't know any mainstream scholar who doubts the historicity of Jesus," said Eric Meyers, an archaeologist and emeritus professor in Judaic studies at Duke University. "The details have been debated for centuries, but no one who is serious doubts that he's a historical figure."¹

God is somewhere in the mix of faith and fact, unwilling to be contained or restricted by either one.

How can I learn to see Jesus when he shows up?

Learn the stories of the Bible. Reframe what you see, hear, experience. Ask for God to help you. Learning to see and know Jesus in our time is like learning a foreign language. It takes intentionality and practice and openness. God shows up all the time and we miss him. But sometimes we're lucky and catch a glimpse. And perhaps it's helpful to say, don't overlook the obvious. If we're always expecting a miracle or someone rising from the dead or a burning bush, we'll miss the scent of spring flowers, the words of forgiveness spoken between us, the bowl of soup served to the hungry, the welcome given to newcomers and so much more.

If you've got more questions, today or another time, don't be afraid to ask!

May God bless our questions and our searching. May God bless our fumbling about in faith. May God bless us in the moments when we understand this incredible gift of love. Amen.

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/12/jesus-tomb-archaeology/>