

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen.*

In last week's sermon, I began to ask the question: What does resurrection look like? What did it look like to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb? What does it look like to us? Now, this is not just an idle question, for resurrection is the foundational concept in the teachings of Jesus and in our Christian beliefs. It is the reason we are gathered here. We celebrate Resurrection each Sunday, no matter in which season of the church year we find ourselves. It is the reason, for example, why Lenten Sundays are called 'Sundays *in* Lent, not *of* Lent', for each and every Sunday, our Christian Sabbath, is always a celebration of Jesus' Resurrection...going back to that first Sunday morning when Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark, and when the disciples met in a locked and secure room that evening. But what does resurrection look like? Not only is that question important because of the teachings and the concept, but also because resurrection is what Christians are supposed to witness about. We are told, by Jesus, and by history, to testify, to witness, about the good news of resurrected life. So, if we are going to be able to do that, and do it well, how will we know it when we see it?

There *are* signs of resurrection all around us, and they may help us see metaphorically what it is all about, if that's helpful: Gale and I observed with wonder yesterday how our flowering trees were beginning to bud, the lilacs and the redbud trees, and how the neighbor house, which had stood empty and lonely this past year, was now full of life and children's voices now that the new neighbors have moved in. And here we are, back in this church building, worshiping together again after a year of absence. These might all be clues to what resurrection might look like. Can you think of any others? Are there metaphors in your personal experience which can lead you to think about new life, about restored life, about forgiven life, about new vitality and vigor? They are things for which to be thankful, I am sure! And our thankfulness, our gratitude can be directed to God's grace, and that's what we do every Sunday around here! But how did things go that first Sunday in Jerusalem? Was it all joyful processions and Alleluias? According to John's Gospel, that day was clouded in fear and confusion, and none of the narrative's characters recognized what resurrection looked like at first.

Mary didn't recognize Jesus in the graveyard, thinking him at first to be the gardener. The disciples, who had heard the report that Jesus was not in the tomb, were in hiding. After all, if Jesus *had* somehow come back to life, what would he want to say and do to them after they all abandoned him in his darkest hour? It wasn't exactly *their* finest hour, was it? What might resurrection now mean for them? John reports that Jesus somehow slipped into the locked room and stood among them. The first words out of his resurrected mouth were "Peace be with you". What a surprise, and what a relief! Yet, they still weren't sure it was really him until he showed them his wounded hands and injured torso. His resurrected body which, while changed and somehow new, still showed the signs of his suffering. What, we wonder, did resurrection look like for them? How is their experience helpful to us, who also hope to know the risen Jesus? The disciples' initial experience of the risen Lord includes passing the peace, quelling fears, the showing of love and respect, the revealing of the scars, and forgiveness. All, perhaps, clues to what resurrected life is like. But, we are told, there was one critical person of their group who was missing that evening, one who had missed the benefit of all those clues.

A word about Thomas: In John's Gospel, there are three instances when Thomas has a speaking part. One of them is in this passage we have heard today. Another is during the story of the death of Lazarus. And one is in response to Jesus' declaration that God's home has rooms for each of us when our time comes. Now, speaking parts, places where people are quoted directly in the Bible texts, can be a bit confusing grammatically. For neither ancient Hebrew, nor Biblical Greek (the two original languages of

the Bible) had punctuation to speak of. There were no question marks or exclamation points in the original texts. The sense of a spoken quote had to be discerned from context without much other help. When we see punctuation in a translated text, it has been added by the translator to interpret what might have been the sense of it. And neither do we have very many times when the Bible tells us how someone spoke, whether something was said in anger, with skepticism, or sarcastically, for example. We don't read that Jesus said something lovingly, or that God said something angrily, using an adverb to describe how something was said. So, when Thomas responds to Jesus' intention to go to see the dying Lazarus, and the others are saying 'No, don't go because the authorities will try to kill you, Jesus', he says 'Let's all go, then, so we can die with him' we don't know if he is being emphatic or sarcastic, do we? And when Jesus has told the disciples that he is going to the Father and that their hearts ought not be troubled because they will be going there too one day, Thomas says 'We don't know where you are going, how will we know the way?' How does he say it, really? Maybe that's sarcastic, too. Now, when he is told that Jesus has risen from the dead and can be seen in this new, resurrected way, he apparently balks and stubbornly refuses to take someone else's word for it. But how does he say it? Sceptically? Sarcastically? Hopefully? Expectantly? The Bible grammar, the lack of true punctuation, let's us ponder all those possibilities, despite the opinion of any particular translator.

We might likewise ponder how we respond to the clues of resurrection, of new life, of life which hasn't died but has changed. When we ask the question: What does resurrection look like?, are we expectant and hopeful, or cynical and sarcastic? It might perhaps make a difference. Christ's risen Body is all around us, comprised of all people and their best intentions. God's Holy Spirit is breathed on us by them every day, and we are called to join them both in witness and in action. Through others, Jesus calls us by name, as he did for Mary and for Thomas, calling each of us to be the Body of Christ. To pass on the peace of the Lord. To treat all our earthly neighbors and strangers with dignity and respect. To love God and each other. In John's First Letter, which Sue read aloud for us this morning, the Evangelist writes that the clues to resurrection are being shared so that our joy may be complete. He says that these clues to the great mystery are declaring what has been seen and touched and heard and experienced, and that they will direct us on a pilgrimage out of darkness into the light. God help us, we may well respond stubbornly, finding the clues just too incredible. But Jesus keeps coming back, ready to show them to us. Just look around...

Jesus invites Thomas, by name, to witness the clues of his wounds, so that he might be able to recognize resurrection and to believe in the possibility, the probability, of new life. Jesus suggests that Thomas even reach inside him to find the answer. And he does. Experiencing the very interior of Christ's risen Body is an invitation to us, too. The scars, the wounds, the sources of hurt and despair, do not disappear when life is renewed, but they become assimilated into the wholeness, the joyful completeness of Christ. If we are to become the Body of the Living Christ, and be good at it, we will probably need to accommodate those scars, to live with them, to honor them, even, as a sign of credibility and authenticity. Thomas authenticates the truth by the wounds, and then witnesses to the whole truth, publicly and personally. Perhaps we should ask not only what resurrection *looks* like in these days, but also what it *feels* like, what it *sounds* like. Christ has been with us since the beginning of creation, and will be with us, calling us by name, and appearing to us as if out of nowhere, for all time to come. And the promise of new life is repeated over and over again in our Holy Scriptures. And the Resurrection continues to be the cornerstone of our faith. I pray that we may all be nourished by that presence, that promise, and that foundation, and that our joy may be complete. Amen. Alleluia!