

Low Sunday 2021: **'Are we an Easter people?'** from Fr. Mike

- Acts 4. 32-35
- Psalm 133
- 1 John 1. 1-22
- John 20. 19-31

Q/ Are we an Easter people, or do we just celebrate an event ?

It's been one week since Easter, one week since the chaos and excitement, one week since the empty tomb, one week since our Bishop Mark gave the first **"Alleluia. Christ is risen"** and those in church with him replied, **"He is risen indeed. Alleluia."** Christians in their own 'locked rooms' in a variety of locations, may have also joined in...

It's one week after the resurrection and the disciples are in the same place they were on Easter night **'the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews.'** They are in the same room behind the same locked doors. So, if the resurrection is such a life changing event, why are they still stuck in the same place? What difference has the empty tomb made? How has it changed them? Has it let them see themselves and their world differently? Has it done anything for them? It doesn't look as if it's made much difference. They are in the same house behind the same locked doors as a week ago. What's changed? I wonder, one week after Easter, what has Christ's resurrection done for us? Is your life different? Do you see and engage the world in new ways? What difference has the empty tomb made in your life over the last week? When I look at my life it looks like it did last Sunday, the week before, and the week before that. And when I look at the world it looks pretty much the same as before.

I used to hear today's gospel and be critical of the disciples. They are stuck in the same place. They should have done better than that. After all death has been defeated ("Christ is

risen. Alleluia”) **Why are their lives no different?**

I was really asking about my own life. Why isn't my life different after Easter? Why am I stuck in the same place? I should be doing better than that. I should be living the resurrection better, more powerfully, more fully, more authentically. After all, "The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia." I have begun, however, to hear today's gospel differently, and recognise more than an event.

A process rather than an event?

Christ's resurrection is undoubtedly a truly massive event. The empty tomb is a life changing event. The resurrection *does* make a difference in our lives, but also takes time.

Resurrection takes time. It is not a singular event, it is something that we grow into. It is therefore a process - a way of being and a life to be lived. By the grace of God, we evolve into resurrected (Easter) people through the combination of our relationships and the circumstances of our lives. God wastes nothing. Every day we are stepping into the resurrected life. It is by no means always easy, and some days are more challenging than others.

I wonder if we sometimes come to Easter Sunday and the empty tomb expecting to wake up on Monday to a whole new life and world. I am guessing that you awoke on Easter Monday to the same life and world you had on Good Friday (only with more chocolate perhaps?) I did. Not because the resurrection failed or because Jesus failed to do "the Jesus thing" in our lives, but because the 'Jesus thing' takes TIME.

Perhaps we need to let go of the fact of the empty tomb, and start claiming the story of resurrection?

There is a difference between facts and story. Facts are one dimensional, stories are multidimensional. Facts inform the *mind*, whereas stories touch the heart. Facts transmit information, stories transform lives. Think about it like this. A fact is static, like a snapshot of a particular moment in time. A story is dynamic, like a cinema film that takes us across time. The empty tomb is a fact. Resurrection is a story (stay with me on this!) Maybe we need to begin to understand resurrection as the movie of our life instead of a snapshot of Christ's life?

The fact of the empty tomb is not the story of the resurrection.

The facts of Jesus' life are not the story of Jesus. The facts of your life and my life are not the story of our life.

The facts are *just the starting point* for the story. The fact of the empty tomb is the starting point for the resurrection story. Whatever facts you woke up to on Easter Monday are simply the starting point for your story of resurrection. Too often, however, we take the facts as the entire story – just look at how we approach '**Didymus**' (St. Thomas) for instance. What facts come to mind when you hear the name Thomas in scripture? He was a doubter. **'... except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe' (v.25)**

That Thomas doubted may be the only fact that comes to mind. It is so prevalent that we even call him 'doubting Thomas.' However, what if that fact is only the starting point, merely the beginning of his resurrection?

Perhaps where we start is less important than where we go or end up! We only need to look a little closer at the story of Thomas. He was the apostle who eventually brought the Gospel to the people of India, dying a martyr after five soldiers killed him with five spears. Is that

the story of a doubter, or of somebody who grew and changed, someone for whom the resurrection of Christ was real, and for whom the empty tomb made a real difference. It just took a little TIME to animate his life. We all know ‘doubting Thomas’ but let us not overlook ‘confessing Thomas’ who is also in today’s gospel, recognising and naming a new relationship, a new way of looking at the world, a new way of being, expressed finally with the words: **‘My Lord and my God!’** Somewhere between doubting and confessing is the story of the resurrection in Thomas’ life. His disbelief is neither good nor bad, as it is only his starting place - and we all have those!

What is your starting place? What are the facts of your life today? Whatever they may be, these are the starting points for your story of resurrection. So, if you are struggling with deep loneliness, sorrow, or loss, *that* is your starting point. **That is the room Christ enters.** If you are (literally or spiritually) locked in a house of fear, confusion or darkness, *that* is your starting point, **and the place Jesus stands.** If illness, old-age, disability or uncertainty are facts of your life, that is your starting point, **and the place Jesus appears.** If you are feeling lost, betrayed, disappointed, or overwhelmed, this is your starting point, **and the point Jesus enters.** If joy, celebration or gratitude are the facts of your life as you read this, then this starting point begins your unique story of resurrection. All the above (and many more examples besides) illustrate the ways our spiritual house gets locked. Remember that whatever it may be for you, it is truly only a starting point.

The great problem is not that the disciples are in the same house behind the same locked doors – that is just *their* starting place. The tragedy would be if the disciples refused to unlock the doors, refused to open the doors, and refused to get out of the house!

Whatever it may be that keeps you locked into the same place, please do not judge this as 'good', 'bad', 'right or wrong', it is simply where you are (only your starting place) and it is the place where Christ stands patiently **'in the midst'** gently saying **'Peace be unto you.'**

It happened twice in today's Gospel, and it can happen in your house too. Consequently, the good news for us is whatever form our personal walls, doors, locks, and negativity, may take, (real or imagined) nothing will ever keep our Lord Jesus out for long.

That holy breath of peace is the key to our unlocking. Therefore, it does not need to be a 'Low Sunday' for anyone. This peace breathes life and hope into us all, providing the necessary strength to be 'Easter People' and as such, His true disciples.

So please, take a deep breath and pause awhile. Make time to take it all in. Allow the resurrection story to percolate your mind, fill your heart, enliven your home and in time, your world. Let it give you courage, Hope and timely healing. Open the doors to the story of your resurrection, and in God's time, get out of the house!



Fr. Mike 'Low Sunday' 2021.