

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

April 12, 2015

Second Sunday in Easter, Year B

The readings this week:

- Acts 4:34-35 ◦ Psalm 133
- 1 John 1:1-2:2 ◦ John 20:19-31

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

The first Sunday night and the week that followed

This passage bridges a week from the first evening of the good news into the future of the church. It's a glossed-over, hazy week, like the first week with a newborn. You can imagine the awe and wonder, wondering and fear, perhaps. Joy.

The writer of the Gospel gives us the story of the birth of the church. Often, we read this in Matthew with the Great Commission or in Acts with Pentecost, and this quieter moment on that first Sunday night passes as just one of several resurrection appearances. But in John's telling, this moment is the moment of birth. When the church becomes embodied.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, his breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Before this moment, the church has just been a crowd around Jesus. Now, it's charged with its own life. You can hear the gentle echoes of Genesis here, with God forming humanity out of dust and breathing the spirit of life that living might begin. Jesus breathes on the disciples and gives them his spirit, and the church is born.

But Thomas wasn't there. He didn't see this birth, and he didn't believe.

He heard about the locked room and the appearance. He heard about Jesus' hands, and he probably saw something in the disciples' eyes, but he didn't get it. A bit like the punchline to a slanted joke, maybe you had to be there. There must have been something awkward there for him – these dear friends who had suddenly lost the plot. It was understandable, of course, after everything that had happened. So he stuck with them, but so sad, wasn't it?

And the next week, it happened again. The doors were shut, Jesus appeared, and this time, he met Thomas. Just as Thomas needed to be met. Physically.

The Gospel of John is such an embodied Gospel. It's full of senses. The Word became flesh and fed the people loaves and fish. It's a gospel of candles in the dark and drawing in the dust, of the stinking realities of death and of tending each other gently. In John, the words of eternal life are words full of human senses.

In church yesterday, Blue watched the elders bring in the elements for Holy Communion. "Look, Mum! It's the wine and daily bread. I love the daily bread." Of course, he does, the physical little monster. Don't we all? That's how we are made. Embodied. Hungry. We love the taste of bread. And the feel of others around us. The hand-holding and tickling and scrabbling everywhere of little ones. The gentle comfort of sitting beside a friend. The smell of the Easter flowers. The hymns that ring out so joyfully our hearts beat faster with the hallelujahs.

That's the humanity that Jesus met us with throughout his earthly ministry. Dividing food, comforting the sick, travelling together. When the disciples try to tell Thomas that it isn't over, that Jesus is doing something new, he hears it only as breath. There is nothing tangible. Nothing for him, then.

And then, the Risen Christ, meets him again. Face-to-face, hands outstretched. Present. And Thomas says "My Lord and my God." The Gospel writer holds a mirror up to the church in this moment. This is what you want, isn't it? This physical awareness, this embodied connection. Here you are – you are Thomas.

We weren't there, and we haven't known the gospel as an embodied reality. But, in Thomas, our hunger is validate and confirmed. The danger for us is to over-spiritualize our faith. To leave out our hunger and our physicality. But the breath of Jesus which sends the church out also calls the church to the table. Take, eat, this is my body. Hold onto the physical blessings of being human. These, too, are the things of God. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Blessed are those who find me in strangers and friends, in wine and daily bread.

And Thomas can say "My Lord and my God." My teacher and my maker. My all in all, who touches my mind and my soul, who made my form and my heart. My very breath. The breath of God within me.

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Acts 4:34-35](#)

Think about a time or experience when someone's generosity toward you really encouraged your spirit. What attitude did the believers have toward one another? How did the Christians show their unity? How effective was the apostles' witness? What godly quality enhanced the unity and service of the early Christians? What did some better-off Christians do from time to time?

[Westwood Community Church](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 133](#)

What is so good or pleasant or blessed about brothers living together in unity? To what is this blessedness compared? What does this psalm say to those who know only the brotherhood and sisterhood as it is portrayed in the media (consider fraternity hazing, sports teams that brawl, family corporations divided by sibling rivalry)? Where are you experiencing strong brother-to-brother or sister-to-sister bonds and blessings that sanctify and sustain God's people, as does "oil" and "dew"? In what way could you experience more of the priestly "oil" and Mount Hermon's "dew"? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#).

[InterVarsity Press](#)

A Fair and Delectable Place

With a kindly countenance our good Lord looked into his side, and he gazed with joy, and with his sweet regard he drew his creature's understanding into his side by the same wound; and there he revealed a fair and delectable place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved and will rest in peace and in love. And with that he brought to mind the dear and precious blood and water which he suffered to be shed for love. And in this sweet sight he showed his blessed heart split in two, and as he rejoiced he showed to my understanding a part of his blessed divinity, as much as was his will at that time, strengthening my poor soul to understand what can be said, that is the endless love which was without beginning and is and always shall be.

- Julian of Norwich 1342-c.1416



Siyasol, [Iskender Deniz](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Acts 4:34-35 shows the power of the Holy Spirit to create out of normal sinners a beautiful thing. It is meant to make us ask, "What could our community do if it listened to the Holy Spirit? What has it done already?"

Open our hearts to hear your Holy Spirit. Inspire us to give where you would have us give and change what you would have us change. Give us the courage to follow you. Amen.

[God Pause, Luther Seminary](#)



Israel365.co.il by Tomi Junger

3rd Reading: [1 John 1:1-2:2](#)

What was John's ultimate goal in writing this book? Does John provide "scientific proof" of the incarnation? Why do you think an incorrect view of God leads to aberrant lifestyles? Have you experienced or know about an "inside attack" of false teaching? What are three true claims (the light) about Jesus Christ that John starts with to guide the readers back "on-track?" (1 John 1:7, 1 John 1:9, 1 John 2:1-2) How can we stay "true to the light" and protect ourselves against false teachers and false teachings? Are a Christian's sins cleansed the instant they commit them? Do you know anyone who would be willing to die for a lie? [Bella Vista Christian Church](#)

4th Reading: [John 20:19-31](#)

When Jesus appears to his disciples, what specific gifts and promises does he give them? Finally, Jesus appears to Thomas. How does Thomas's attitude—both before and after Jesus appears to him—add credibility to the resurrection? What do you learn from Jesus' encounter with Thomas about dealing with people who have doubts about Christianity? Who could you help to understand and believe the claims of Christ? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#).