

# Sermons at St Paul's

The Second Sunday of Easter

April 12, 2015

Carroll Anne Sheppard; Licensed Preacher, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

Last week, we celebrated Easter here at St. Paul's, along with every Christian congregation in the world, and with many who do not call themselves Christians, yet revere and admire Jesus. And what we celebrated last Sunday was his triumph over death and sin and violence in the Resurrection.

We will be celebrating this amazing and joyous history-changing event in a special way for the next fifty days, until May 24<sup>th</sup> this year, for that is the feast of Pentecost. So we have fifty days minus the last seven – 43 days left to get a handle on just what the Resurrection means in 2015.

Our world is too permeated with science and big data for us to just accept such an event. Given the level of terror, war and uncertainty in our world, we feel most of the time that we have to do something. We are constantly being urged to act, but it is nearly impossible to know what to do. What are we supposed to do about the Resurrection? Perhaps nothing. Perhaps it is a time to simply be and let that peace that Jesus talked about quietly give us the gift of joy.

Professor Peter Ens, who spoke at the Sunday Forum two weeks ago, said we should ask how we can empty ourselves so that the Resurrection's light may shine out from us. He asked: how do we die to the self-centering tendencies that fill us, so that new life can take root in us?

What would happen if we indeed emptied ourselves so that Resurrection light could shine out from us? If we lost our self-important identities and self-centering ways, who would the world see? Would they see Jesus?

Perhaps that sounds impossible, and like claiming more sanctity than we feel we might ever achieve. But consider that we have been assured in our Baptism that we are "Christ's own forever." What if we take that promise seriously and in a spirit of humility and compassion begin to act on it?

If you were here on March 1<sup>st</sup>, you heard me say that Lent is a time when we can re-name ourselves to God. Our Easter season is certainly a time when we can re-claim ourselves from the world. You see, Jesus' Resurrection did not just change the disciples' world, or the Roman world, or the Gentile world. Jesus' death and Resurrection changed human history.

We can reclaim our identity as people of the Resurrection from those who would fill our hearts and minds with endless Self-promoting things and thoughts, strengthened by the simple fact of the Resurrection. We are in the presence of great power -- power strong enough to vanquish the darkness of sin and the reign of death. Jesus rises with enough power to let us relax and rejoice. He has already done the impossible work -- once, for all.

In the Epistle today, the writer of the First Letter of John says: "***We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.... God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.***"

Peter Ens reminded us that following Jesus, losing our (worldly pride and self-centered) lives, for the sake of Jesus, will lead to our realizing that here, now, in this life; we are already seated with Jesus before God. We just have to start acting like it! We have to start acting as though the Resurrection light that burst out of the tomb, mattered to us! We have to begin to act as though we believed that we are redeemed, loved, treasured and transformed by Easter! We have to see the Resurrection light streaming out from us, filling the whole earth with forgiveness and love.

What if, with all compassion for ourselves and God's creation and in all humility -- knowing that we could never do this for ourselves -- we, here at St. Paul's Church, on April 12, 2015, let the Resurrection light shine through us and transform us? Wouldn't it transform the whole earth?

You see that is what Thomas did, two thousand years ago. He had been too taken up with himself and his cares to be with the disciples in the house where they had met for the Passover meal. So he missed the first in-pouring of grace as Jesus arrived to bless them. What was he doing? Who knows? He was busy. Let's give him some space and assume that he was doing something that seemed important to him. But the simple fact is that he missed it. He missed one of the great moments of history.

So he toughed out his failure to show up, and did what many of us do: the best defense is a good offense. No big deal, says Tom, I've got to see it for myself. (When all else fails, assert your right to make up your own mind on your own terms, and reestablish your own standing –right?)

Jesus called his bluff. Jesus appeared again, and told Thomas to go ahead and test him. In one, blinding flash, Thomas got it.

What happened was cataclysmic. The darkness and self-focus in his soul was swept away, and replaced by knowledge that transformed him. He understood that Jesus' resurrection had changed not only him, but history and the whole world. God was present in the room with him, and he was part of God.

At that moment, Thomas lost his old life with its busyness and self-focus. It was replaced with humility and compassion. "My Lord and my God!" he cried. And at that moment he gained his life for Jesus' sake. Resurrection light filled Thomas and streamed out from him.

Tradition has it that after Pentecost, Thomas left on a mission trip. He traveled east, and legend says that he reached southern India, where he founded many churches. Today, you can visit those churches, as an Indian friend of mine did, on pilgrimage with her family. The Mar-Thoma church of south India claims its descent from the apostle Thomas.

Yes, during the Easter season, we can re-claim our identities as people of the Resurrection, people in whom the light of God shines forth. Every day we live into resurrected life, in humility and compassion, following Jesus' Way, we are losing our lives for his sake, and saving them for God.

And if the great saints are to be believed, this is the way of deep and abiding joy.

So rejoice, dear friends, for we are invited to be part of something life-changing. And if we accept, then like Thomas, we may well cry: My Lord and my God!"

***Amen.***

***Amen***