



BISHOP MEGAN M. TRAQUAIR

A SERMON FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

This transcript of the video was released on 4/19/2020

<https://youtu.be/sOzzZ3ZnWx8>

Greetings my friends,

Grace and peace to you on this, the second Sunday of Easter.

My neighborhood is filled with people who are out taking walks. They are walking their dogs, they are walking their children, they are walking children, toddlers, and strollers, sometimes all together. It's amazing what they manage. I'm out there too, busy walking my dogs, and one of the things I noticed is there is a particular area in our neighborhood where the scent of the blossoms hit me long before I come around the corner to where the Jasmine or the orange tree is growing. The smell of those sweet blossoms saturates the area. It permeates the whole area. It is thick. You can almost taste orange blossoms long before you can come around the corner and recognize the source of that smell.

I think the good news in the hope of the resurrection is very much like that. It permeates the air throughout all of these days of Easter, the great 50 days; and we can sense it ourselves even before we recognize the one who has arrived in our midst and is carrying the hope to us.

In our Gospel today, the disciples are closed in, behind a locked door, in fear. This should sound very familiar to us because we ourselves, are sheltering in behind closed doors, and are definitely experiencing some fear. In addition the disciples do not know when they will have a chance to go out again. They do not know what their future holds, they cannot guess at it, and so they are locked in not only physically, but in their minds as well, and the same is true for us. We know that we will be released one day, but we do not know when, and into that locked place, the risen one appears.

Jesus appears in their midst, and they rejoice when they recognize him. They recognize the sound of his voice. He greets them, he gives them his peace, he breathes upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas wasn't there. Thomas did not experience that amazing appearance of Jesus, and so Thomas, with his courage and his stubbornness says, "*I will not believe. Unless I see his hands, and can touch is side, I will not believe,*" and then eight days later, Jesus appears, and he says to Thomas, "*See, here I am. Touch my hands, touch my side, see that I am real.*"

Thomas does not need to do that. It is the voice and the presence of Jesus, the risen one that convinces him on the spot; and his response is, *“My lord, and my God.”*

You know, we are often very hard on Thomas for this, but we should not be. Consider how it really was coming to know and to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. The women did not believe it to be true until they met the risen one in the garden, and then they went away with their hearts full of fear, and hope, and excitement, and rejoicing. Likewise, the disciples heard the story about Jesus rising from the dead, and they did not believe the women; not until Jesus appeared to them, and showed himself to them. And then thirdly is Thomas, who did not believe the disciples, until the risen one had appeared to him as well. And of course, the appearance of Jesus in their midst made each one of them: witnesses to his power, and his life, and to the resurrection. Thomas had doubt seeking understanding, and in the end he had understanding and faith, and became a powerful witness. We know that the Gospel overturns everything. It certainly overturned something important in Roman times. You see the crucifixion was a long drawn out, any crucifixion, horrible affair, and it was like that on purpose. It was a public spectacle of pain and suffering, and the reason that the Romans had this kind of punishment was precisely to evoke fear, terror, and oppression in the people. Nobody would dare to do anything like that again, seeing what could happen to those that were treasonous, as Rome considered it. And then imagine what happened, in the place of that fear, it was blown apart. With the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples no longer feared anything that Rome could throw at them; as considerable as that was, nothing stopped them once they met the risen one.

The good news for us is that Jesus lives. Hope has not died. Hope lives on in a person, in the person of Jesus our Lord, and our hope lives on not so much in our hearts, but it as its greatest source in Jesus who lives and walks among us today.

So what does that mean for us? We are now in week 100 at least, of the COVID virus, or maybe if we are using biblical language, we could say it's been 40 weeks; a very, very long time. We know that it will come to an end but it has not come yet. What does this good new mean for us? We know that it means that Jesus is coming through our doors; our closed doors; just as he did for the disciples. And we know that we will meet him in our prayers, and in our worship, and in our interactions with all the people that we care for, and even strangers that we waive to as we go by in the street. I hope that you will consider these coming weeks, these remaining weeks as an invitation. This is an invitation to go deeper.

You know sometimes in the church we spend a great deal of energy on Lent, and a great deal of energy on Holy Week, and our churches have done a great job. But it is sometimes like being an athlete who has prepared, and stretched and warmed up, and once the starting gun goes off, we run three or four steps, and then immediately head during the Easter season to the bench.

Consider this an invitation to stay in the race, and take a chance to go deep into scripture and into the presence of God in your lives.

I am inviting the entire diocese to engage in a big read; a reading of the good book of the Gospel of St. Matthew. We have information on our website about that (norcalepiscopal.org/good-book-club). There are lots of ways to do it that require not very much work from anyone, but give the Holy Spirit a chance to move in our midst as we study Matthew with others, in these great 50 days.

And I invite you in these days of prayer, and study, and reading, to bring yourself. Bring all of yourself. Bring your scars, your troubles, worries, bitterness that you cannot let go of, resentments that dog your heels. Bring your scars to that meeting with Christ in the Gospel of Matthew. You see, when Thomas met Jesus the risen one, Thomas brought his scars. He brought his doubt, his stubbornness, great courage, but also things that were holding him back; and he met Jesus who came also with his own scars; wounds that he bore on our behalf, by which he has liberated us; and that meeting was utterly transformative. It changed Thomas forever.

I wonder if you know that the ancient church which is in India, counts as its founder, the apostle Thomas. They say that around the year 52 A.D., that Thomas arrived on their shores near Madras, and there is still a big cathedral in Kerala which commemorates his presence there. They call themselves the, "*Mar Thoma Church*." So imagine what has happened: Thomas with his scars, met Jesus with his scars, and everything was changed.

What might happen to us in these great 50 days? What might we do, or be, for God, for each other, for the poor, for creation if we had accepted this invitation from God. If we bring our own self, our own hurts, to meet the one who bore those hurts and rose again.

I think I can already see a little bit of it, because our churches have essentially planted another 60 or so online churches, new church plants in just a matter of weeks, and the people who are tuning in to hear the good news of God in Jesus Christ, are exponentially more than who we usually can get in our pews. This is what happens when we meet the risen one. This is our hope. This is our joy.

Remember the words that we hear in Jeremiah, "*For surely I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not to harm; to give you a future and a hope.*"

Amen.