

First Trinity Lutheran Church
John 19:19-31
Acts 10:34-43
1 Corinthians 15:19-26

“Life in the Resurrection”

There is an old saying: “I’m from Missouri; you have to show me.” This does not mean that Missourians are slow to learn. Rather, it means that they do not easily take someone’s word without some form of verification. They are not unique in this. Actually, many of us are very much like the Missourians; we too want concrete evidence before we are willing to accept certain claims.

Those who share these somewhat skeptical sentiments have a good friend in the apostle Thomas. Though he is sometimes referred to as doubting Thomas, he still had faith. But he was unwilling to accept the resurrection of Jesus on the word of the other disciples. He wanted concrete proof; he wanted to see for himself and to touch the wounds. How can we blame him? No one really expected that Jesus would rise from the dead. Even though Jesus himself told his disciples that he would rise after three days, it seems to have come as a surprise. As for Thomas, after his experience of the risen Lord, his enthusiastic testimony was a remarkable declaration of faith in Christ’s divinity. He cried out: “My Lord and my God!”

Generally speaking, our faith comes to us through the words of others. We hear them at home, at work, at church and from many other corners of our lives. Thomas was skeptical about what was told him because he thought the message was too good to be true. We, on the other hand, may be so familiar with the news of the Resurrection that we cease to be amazed by it. If this is the case, we certainly need a patron saint like Thomas.

The readings for the Sundays after Easter are meant to provide religious instruction for those newly baptized. But we all can benefit from this teaching. There are several lessons to be learned in the readings for today. The first concerns our responsibility for passing on the religious tradition that has been handed down to us. As Christians, we are all called to this

responsibility, regardless of our age, our occupation or our state in life. How is this to be done? Actually, the ways are quite simple. We pass it on through the way we live our lives, whether it is done formally or informally; we proclaim the message as we live out our ethical values. For example, much has been said this week about the racist remark Don Imus said on the Radio about the Rutgers University Women's Basketball team. A remark that ultimately got him fired. I listen to a lot of talk radio as I drive my car throughout the community. It is amazing what people say about other people while thousands perhaps even millions of people are listening. Much of what we try to pass off as a joke about a certain ethnic group can come from deeply hidden racism, classism, and sexism. I have come to the opinion that we don't have to cut somebody down to tell a funny joke. There is more than enough wholesome humor around than to make our attempt at humor demeaning and degrading. I believe that what we say and how we act proclaims, "We have seen the Lord."

A second lesson to be learned today concerns the role the Christian community plays in our lives. Community-based societies, like those described in the Bible, are well aware of the importance of belonging to a group. Membership gives identity, meaning and support. Today's readings confirm this. There is a communal dimension to every post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus. In fact, Thomas's predicament was a consequence of his absence from the community of disciples a week earlier. In the first reading, while Peter is a prominent figure, the miracles were performed by all the apostles. God's concern is for the entire people. We who live in a society that values an exaggerated form of individualism have much to learn about being members of the body of Christ. We hope to share this sense of community during this Easter season under the theme Life in the Resurrection. Given the fact of the resurrection, we want to explore how do we live our lives in this earth. Combine this with the fact that the Easter season is observed during the season of spring at least in Northern Hemisphere when the earth is teeming with life. As a community how do we deal with pollution, violent weather and natural disasters, drought

and floods, and global warming? This earth that God has given to us is our home, in light of the resurrection, how are we to care for it, live in it, and preserve it for the generations of life that will come after us. These are just a few of these things we want to think about on Sunday mornings this Easter season.

The first reading from Acts Chapter 10 provides us with yet another lesson. It illustrates how the power of the Resurrection working through ordinary people can affect miracles. Some might think this is too bold a claim. And yet a friendly smile, a gentle touch, a willingness to forgive have healed more than one broken spirit; and the challenging words of a parent, a teacher or a friend have bolstered many a mind and heart. We have all witnessed such miracles with our own eyes; we ourselves may have even been touched by them. Why are we so afraid, then, to believe that we can make a difference in our world?

In the reading from the Book of Revelation, the visionary named John describes an extraordinary experience he had while living in banishment in the penal colony on the island of Patmos. Not even incarceration could prevent the spread of the Gospel. John's preaching days might have been over, but he could still write. The scene described is of extraordinary splendor, and there in the midst of it all was "one like a son of man," presumably the risen Christ. The message is even more astounding than the vision itself. Death has been overcome; Jesus the Christ is now alive forever. It is the same message that Thomas first found so hard to accept. It is the message that we are called to live out in our lives, so that through us others will be able to exclaim, "We have seen the Lord!"