



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE REV. LINZI STAHLECKER, CURATE  
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 16, 2023  
ACTS 2:14a,22-32; PSALM 16; 1 PETER 1:3-9; JOHN 20:19-31

## BUILDING ENDURANCE FOR JOY

*John 20:19-31 [When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, 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, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.]*

During Holy Week, Troy (my spouse) kept things ticking over at home, thankfully, he prepped and provided all the meals while I was here. On one of those evenings, my youngest had one of his middle school buddies over for dinner. After a wee bit of chit chat, and some questions about where I was, Troy told our young guest it was Holy Week, the run

up to Easter, and that this was a particularly busy time for the church, and for priests. After a moment's reflection, our young friend asked... what even is Easter?

Now, Troy, feeling some pressure to give a brilliant and theologically compelling answer to this unexpected question, also knew he had only about 20 words to do it

in before all interest would be lost ... so, he succinctly summarized Easter as Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday and his unexpected and miraculous resurrection from the dead on the Sunday that followed, what is now known as Easter Sunday. It's on this event, Troy explained, that the whole Christian faith is built.

Wondering how he's done, curious of the response he's going to get to this great story abridged, Troy looks at the 13-year-old he's at table with, she holds eye-contact for a brief moment before nodding and responding with: "huh."

Huh.

Not much of a response to a synopsis of the greatest story ever told.

But it's perhaps not entirely unexpected or inappropriate.

Today's middle schoolers are the first generation to have been born into a world dominated by technology, born into relationship with the internet, and embedded in social media feeds from a very young age. This world, today's world, is brimming with story and image, it's overflowing with content specifically designed to grab their attention entirely, if only briefly.

The world they must navigate is also a world of hyper real computer graphics that's filling with deep fake technology, Artificial Intelligence and bots that convincingly mimic real people. All kinds of stories are being told and illustrated in ways unimaginable just a few years ago. Being receptive to all of this would be overwhelming at best, and dangerous at worst... and so, remaining kinda neutral in the midst of it all might actually be a wise coping strategy.

So what then of *our* storytelling, our telling of the definitive story, in this world in which so many voices compete to be heard, where all kinds of startling tales jostle for attention in a highly sophisticated, multi-media town square where there seems to be no limit on depiction, on embellishment, on creating a feast for the senses to tempt belief ...

... the Easter story has always been a tricky one to tell, it's always been best encountered... through lives being lived, lives transformed by the power of the story being shared. Lives which together give flesh to the body of the risen Christ in this world, that together offer an actual body to be encountered and so known and believed in; such an utterly incredible tale

told, however well, is instinctively doubted or dismissed.

Many of us here are transformed a little each year by our annual participation in the 40 days of Lent. Possibly as a result of our cultural inheritance mixed with years of our own practice, many of us readily commit to this extended time of self-denial, of penitential prayer, of contemplation of Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem and his crucifixion, commit to being in the suffering and the pain.

And at the end of this willingly undertaken journey of self-examination, and inevitable transformation ... The Great Vigil and the first Sunday of Easter are a marvelous affair, jubilant and rousing, their peak, pinnacle moments of celebration, and rightly so... yet our Easter season is 50 days long. The story is not over on that first Sunday, we are on another journey, now to Pentecost, it is another journey of transformation, but this one in joy, our primary response to the disruptive, earth-shattering, life-and-faith-altering reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead!

How might our lives ever more effectively share the Easter story with the world if we were to build endurance in our rejoicing, stamina in our celebration of Jesus'

resurrection, that we might radiate an indescribable and glorious joy for all of Eastertide and be transformed by it. It is, after all, to the echo of the resurrection, to this great story of Easter, that we return each and every Sunday in this place.

Our Easter story is the ultimate story of transformation, it's *the* story of God's abiding and reconciling love transforming this world by Jesus' resurrection. This story assures us that death is not the end, that creation is being renewed through the limitless power of God's love.

This story sets before us an invitation to take up its truth, this hope, take it into our very being, to know that death does not have the last word, that it has lost its power over us and that we might be changed by our joy in that knowing. This is the great story, and it is ours to share as ongoing, life-transforming celebration.

In this life, there is no denying we still experience pain, we still grieve, we are still confronted by injustice and oppression, yet the Easter story infuses even our most profound suffering with hope. Jesus' resurrection changed and changes everything.

It places the power and presence of God firmly at the very center of all, and it steadfastly refuses to allow this saving

reality to be dislodged or undermined .. by any system of worldly power, by any time of personal or communal suffering, or by any habit of thought or cultural pressure.

The Easter story is best told, best shared with others, by our lives, by our responses and our decisions, through our relationships, and in all the ways in which we reject despair and are continually transformed by hope. This great story is made real for those who've not yet heard it by our joy.

Let's build our endurance for this joy together, and for celebration, this

Eastertide let's cultivate a lasting ability to radiate the truth of God's renewal of creation, let's overflow with hopeful expectation.

In response to the Easter proclamation: Christ is Risen, let's not drift toward a neutral ambivalence in our hearts as the weeks pass, instead let's sing out the Easter story, rejoicing for the full 50 days, "Christ is Risen indeed, alleluia, alleluia!!"



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*