

# WANTED: A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

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**ACTS 4:32-35**

**JOHN 20:19-30**

**EASTER II 2018**

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## **TODAY IS THE SECOND SUNDAY IN THE EASTER SEASON.**

Our society has already moved on. Next up: Mother's day-order your flowers now, and no, we have no more lilies. But for the Church, Easter is a season, not a day. Easter is simply too important to be discarded after a Sunrise Service and a Church breakfast. Easter proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Messiah and confesses that his resurrection is the most important event in the history of creation.

And so for seven consecutive Sundays beginning on Easter Sunday and ending on the Sunday before Pentecost, the Church provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the implications of Jesus' resurrection for our life here and hereafter. The lectionary will provide us with encounters with the risen Lord, encounters which it hopes will give us peace and the courage for the living of these days. Encounters which most importantly will impart the ultimate gift God wants to give us, eternal life. So let us continue on our Easter Journey which is a full ten days longer than the Lenten Journey we just completed.

## **AS JOHN TELLS THE STORY, JESUS APPEARED FIRST TO MARY MAGDALENE.**

After her encounter with the risen Lord, Mary runs to the disciples who have gathered behind locked doors for fear that they too would be arrested and executed. **It is quite obvious that they do not believe her story; I mean why would Jesus appear to her and not them?** Had Thomas been there, he would have been the loudest in voicing disbelief. But Thomas was out somewhere that day. I suspect my namesake was out buying food for supper; if he were going to die at the hands of his Jewish enemies, he would rather do it on a full stomach!

## **LOCKED DOORS, HOWEVER, PRESENT NO BARRIER TO THE RISEN LORD.**

All of a sudden, Jesus is standing among them. The disciples are terrified, and rightly so. When Jesus needed them, they deserted him. With the Psalmist they could confess, “Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” In addition to abandoning Jesus to his enemies, the disciples did not believe the word Jesus had sent to them through Mary Magdalene. When hope is shattered faith disappears.

## **BUT JESUS HAS COME TO SAVE NOT JUDGE THEM.**

**He has come not to punish his disciples but to bring them three gifts.** Not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but peace, purpose, and power.

***Peace be with you, Jesus says to them by way of a greeting.*** But it is more than a greeting. Jesus is forgiving any sin they may have committed against him. This in turn is a sign pointing to the fact that Jesus is restoring the broken relationship between them and his heavenly Father. He shows them his wounds so that they can be certain that it is he and not his ghost or some other dreadful apparition. Jesus is in fact something not seen before, a resurrected person, a completely new creation. He has died and is now alive again and beyond death's reach forever. The disciples rejoice and celebrate.

***But Jesus did not come simply to assuage their guilt, diminish their fears, and put joy in their hearts.*** Jesus came to give their lives new direction, new meaning, and a new purpose. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." God had sent Jesus as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. **That sin was the wedge that the serpent had driven between humankind and God.** It is no accident that Jesus' tomb was in a **garden** and that he first appeared to Mary in a **garden**. Long ago and far away in a Garden called Eden, humankind first distrusted God and God's loving care for them. Creation had been plummeting downhill ever since. Jesus has been sent to heal the breach and restore the goodness of God's creation. Jesus has come to point the

old creation in the direction of the new. Jesus is now sending his disciples into the world to go and do likewise. *They will do this not so much by dying the way Jesus died but by living the way Jesus lived.* No doubt they wondered how in the world they could do that.

**Jesus then gives them his third gift.** He imparts the Holy Spirit, thereby equipping them to live as creatures in the New Creation, children of God, born not of the flesh but of the Spirit. The disciples are thereby empowered to live lives that mirror the life of Jesus. That is to say, they can now live lives that reflect their trust in God's love for them and for the entire world. They can proclaim that love in words and deeds. Jesus has empowered them to love one another as he has loved them.

## **WELL, THAT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD FOR THOSE DISCIPLES WHO WERE IN THAT ROOM.**

But what about you and me? We have not seen the risen Lord. We now get the point of the rest of the story. Remember that Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared. When the disciples tell Thomas about Jesus his response is "Yeah, right!" he refuses to take them at their word. Or perhaps he simply could not make himself believe them. He demands a close encounter of the third kind. Or perhaps it's a close encounter of the fourth kind-he wants to see, hear, and touch Jesus as well. When Jesus appears the next Sunday offering Thomas what he needs to come to belief, Thomas responds with the highest confession of faith found in the

Bible- “My Lord and my God”. ***Jesus then says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”*** That is to say blessed are we who have come to faith through the hearing of God’s word in Scripture such as we find right here in John’s Gospel.

### **JOHN’S VERY NEXT SENTENCE MAKES THAT POINT.**

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” We can and do encounter the Risen Lord in these stories, and encountering him, we too receive peace and purpose and power.

### **TODAY IS THE SECOND SUNDAY IN THE EASTER SEASON.**

Like the disciples of old, we have celebrated Christ’s resurrection with joyful alleluias and jubilant hosannas. Jesus has triumphed over sin and death and for that we are glad. Jesus has given us the power to become children of God and therefore heirs to heaven. But Jesus did not rise from the dead just to make us happy or secure a place for us after

our deaths. **Since we are children of God *now*, we must begin to live as children of God *now*.** We cannot simply thank Jesus with our lips; we must thank him with our lives. Nor can we plead that such living is impossible for us, because Jesus has empowered us to live as children of God through the gift of the Holy Spirit. ***The Gospel Truth is that we do not have to settle for living old creation lives.*** We have the possibility of living new creation lives. We have been given the power to rise above our old selves and live new and loving lives. We have been given the power to leave behind the grave clothes that have kept us bound to our old selves and to walk freely into the future which God is creating. This is the message of Easter.

But like those first disciples our transformation may take several encounters with our Risen Lord. Notice the disciples who had seen Jesus on Easter Sunday evening were still in hiding a week later. And even then, John tells us they went back to fishing in Galilee. Jesus had to come to them again and again to effect the change.

And so we come to encounter the Lord Sunday after Sunday. We spend time in prayer each day. We pour over the stories about Jesus in our bibles and try to follow his commandments in our daily lives. Of one thing we can be certain: Jesus will come to us again and again, giving us whatever we need to become part of his New Creation, children of God and therefore heirs to Eternal life. Alleluia!