

## **Sermon Easter 2B: Living as Easter People, Doubts and All**

### **Introduction: Looking for Sign**

The shortest sermon I've ever experienced took place in Virginia;

On the Saturday following Easter more than twenty years ago.

Our neighbor's first child was being baptized along with twenty other babies and toddlers;

And we were there to be part of this important moment in their life.

After the opening hymn and the readings and the Gospel, the priest stood up and said,

"The signs of Easter are all around us. Amen."

"Now, will the baptismal families please come forward?"

I nearly laughed out loud as what a pitiful sermon he had just preached;

Not being judgmental or anything like that, but in case you haven't noticed;

I'm kind of interested in preaching and good sermons;

I think it's an important part of our worship to try and explain

Some of the meaning of the scriptures and the Christian life;

And the promise of God's presence and grace for us.

A one-sentence sermon just didn't cut it for me;

Though come to think of it, my wife, Amy, kind of liked the shortness.

And yet, though I can't remember exactly what I preached on Easter last year or ten years ago;

I remember this little sermon every Easter;

I remember because it makes me pause and look at the signs of Easter;

And consider what it means for you and me

As we look for signs of God's presence in our lives;

And try to figure out how to live as Easter people in the world.

Looking for signs is part of the human and Christian condition;

We look for signs because we have real doubts about what Easter is all about;

We look for signs because sometimes we're not sure God is really present;

We look for signs because we have doubts that need encouragement.

Most of us could do with some signal or indication to remind us that God loves us and wants us;

That Jesus' death brought real forgiveness for real sins;

That His resurrection really does mean that death is no longer the final word;

But the final word is life – life now and life beyond the door of death.

Frederick Buechner, novelist and sometime preacher has posed the question this way:

Why doesn't God send us a sign that takes away our doubt?

Something like a message in the sky, written by the rearrangement of the universe

With the stars and the sun and the moon to dot the i's and cross the t's;

So that the night sky would read, "I am God! I am here! I love and want you."

Or Woody Allen, the well known comedian has said that he would believe in God;

If God would send him a sign, such as making a large deposit in a bank account;

Under the name of Woody Allen.

We all want signs; we want signs to remove our doubts about the existence of God;

We want signs to help us believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead;

As we want signs about God's presence in our lives, right now, today;

And that's okay.

It's okay that we want some signs because it means that we're facing our doubts honestly;

It means that we are being honest and open, rather than closed and dismissive;

And if we're willing to search for signs and answers to believe, guess what?

God is willing to show us; God is willing and able to answer us;

God is willing to make Himself known to us;

God will show us just what we need to believe.

Because it is in real and honest doubting and seeking that God can strengthen our faith;

It's in looking for signs, in being open to the presence of God

That we will see and experience and know God for ourselves.

And when the signs come, and they are literally all around us;

When God responds to our doubts and wonderings;

Then you and I need to be willing to move from doubt to faith;

And to live our lives in the reality of Easter and God's purposes for our living.

### **Doubting Thomas**

If I were to mention the names of some of Jesus' first followers to you

And ask you to write down the first word that comes to mind;

It's unlikely that you would all come up with the exact same word.

For instance, if I were to mention Judas Iscariot, many of you would write down betrayer;

But not everyone;

If I were to mention Simon Peter, many would write faith, but not all;

And if I were mention James and John together, some might write the sons of Zebedee;

But not everyone.

But when I mention Jesus' follower named Thomas;

Almost all of you would write down doubting;

Indeed, so closely do we associate Thomas with this word;

That we've coined a phrase after him, Doubting Thomas,

To describe anyone who doubts some truth.

Like so many of us, Thomas wanted signs

About whether Jesus really rose from the dead, but his nickname is not really fair;

You may be interested to know that when Jesus set his face for Jerusalem and death;

The disciples thought it would be certain death for all of them, too;

And Thomas is the one who said,

“Then let us go with Him so that we may die with Him.”

But we don't remember brave Thomas, willing to follow Jesus to the very end;

No, we remember the scene from this Sunday's Gospel;

When Thomas missed Jesus' resurrection appearance in the upper room;

And doubted his friends and fellow disciples.

And when those who have seen the evidence tell Thomas that Christ is alive;

There's not a hint of saintly wonder or awe or acceptance of this miracle;

But only the entirely human and honest response of

“Unless I see the scars and unless I touch Him, I will not believe.”

And wonder of wonders, God responds to Thomas' honest doubts;

God responds and gives Thomas what he needs to believe;

Because Jesus comes to His followers again in that upper room;

And gives Thomas the opportunity to touch His hands and His feet;

To put his hand in Jesus' pierced side so that Thomas can believe.

Jesus has no blame or condemnation for Thomas' doubts;

He doesn't wag His finger at Thomas and tell him he should know better;

Or that Thomas should have more faith;

He graciously gives Thomas what Thomas needs to put his doubts aside;

And Thomas responds with the strongest of statements of faith;

Recorded in any of the Gospels, “My Lord and my God!”

What began in honest doubt and disbelief is transformed by God to faith and certainty;  
And with Thomas' doubts about Jesus' resurrection put to rest;  
Thomas spends the rest of his life as an Easter person;  
Living and telling others about God's love and God's purposes;  
Responding to other doubters even at the cost of his own life.

### **Moving From Doubt to Faith**

And God promises to respond to our doubts, too;  
This God who loves us so will answer our open, honest questions about God and Easter;  
About what it means to be a follower of Christ and an Easter person;  
So that we can move from doubt to faith.

It's all right to doubt;  
It's all right to have questions about God and Easter and to wrestle with them;  
We all have these moments and God uses our doubts to deepen our faiths;  
God uses our questions and struggles because it means we are open;  
And God loves even the smallest of openings to enter into our lives.

You may not hear a one sentence sermon;  
The stars may not be rearranged into some celestial bulletin board;  
A bank account may not mysteriously be opened in your name;  
And we may not be able to touch the scars on Jesus' body;  
But God will make Himself known if we are honestly seeking Him.

So, if you want to know God, to love God, and to experience God's presence in your life;  
If you want more certainty about the Resurrection and the life God is calling us to live;  
Then ask God to make Himself known to you;  
Ask God to respond to your doubts;  
Or as Jesus says, "Ask. Seek. Knock."

God will answer. There will be signs;

And when God answers your doubts through prayer or reading the Bible;

Or through coming to church or talking with other Christians;

Doubt some more;

And then allow the gentle hand of God to touch your life;

And draw you into a relationship of love that has no ending;

So that one day, maybe even today, like Thomas;

You and I will be able to say with a sure confidence, "Jesus, my Lord and my God."

Amen.