

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

April 7, 2024



## PEACE

*when we're scared*

by Drew Downs

What are the emotions we associate with Easter? Joy is first. Perhaps gratitude and a general uplift. But the resurrection appearances offer another which may be greater: peace.

We are used to hearing Jesus say “peace be with you” and dealing with freaked out disciples. Telling them not to fear. But what we have is a moment of total unrest and confusion. Perhaps at a level they (or we!)

have never before experienced. They are in a straight-up existential crisis. And the impossible *is happening*. That’s what Jesus walks into and offers them peace.

There’s a reason it is the most common refrain from Jesus to his disciples. And why it is one we need to hear over and over. Because there are things that scare us--and make us act weird. Jesus is giving us a gift for now! Peace. This is not the end of our story.

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## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### Apocalyptic

We generally associate the word apocalypse with destruction and the world ending. But it really just means “unveiling”. And when we use the word in the church or scripture, we are most often referring to an *unveiling* of what God is doing.

We get to the destruction thanks to the genre of writing we call apocalyptic. Primarily because the unveiling of God’s plan means changing things in the world, bringing some things to an end—which can feel pretty catastrophic to the people who benefit from the way things are.

Apocalyptic also speaks to the Easter story. Because it unveils the lengths God will go to heal the world. It reveals the power and love of God to transform death and offer us a thriving life now.

As much as we like the flowers, the pastels, and the general life-affirming context of our experience of Easter, the apocalyptic character of the Resurrection is far more powerful. Because it unveils the nature of life and death for what it is. It forces us to confront our fears, frustrations, and disappointments. And it makes us embody a different way of living in our world now.

That different way includes less fear of death and more mercy toward others. A change of our own hearts and the willingness to forgive the change of another’s heart. And therefore, at the root of it, face what God is revealing about us—what we believe—and who we are willing to become in light of it, which can be scary. But Jesus reminds us that we shouldn’t fear it. *This* is what’s real.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Second Sunday of Easter*

April 7, 2024

### **Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

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

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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.

## Reflection

We usually take Thomas's statement "Unless...I will not believe" as a kind of rational skepticism. In part, because this is the kind of skeptical response we're used to offering. "I've gotta see it to believe it!" we say. But I think what we're trying to say is something more akin to "I *can't* believe." As if belief is something that happens *to* us. Something totally outside of our control. In short, what *you* do **makes** *me* believe.

Jesus tells it different. Belief is up to us. The onus isn't on God to *make* you believe. It is on us to make the actual effort to believe.

What Thomas is doing is setting the terms for that choice. It is his way of saying *Here's what it will take for me to believe, so if you can offer me that, I'll go ahead and do it.*

The gospel turns this on its head immediately as Jesus actually does offer Thomas what he asked for, but he doesn't actually **need** it to believe, because he is moved to see it differently in the moment.

This is a wonderfully generous and touching moment. Jesus offers what he doesn't need to—and so does Thomas, actually. And it shows that we are in the same position. That we might prefer God *made* us believe, but it really is our choice—an active one—to believe. Whether we see anything or not.

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ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807  
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG

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