

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Second Sunday of Easter
April 12, 2026
Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

"What Do You Need?"

You should've been here on Easter! What a great day! But now, we are at the second Sunday of Easter, the so-called "low Sunday" of the Christian year. The joyous anthems are put away; the full sanctuary is only a memory; and the warm glow has subsided. You should've been here on Easter.

Of course, to be perfectly honest, I should have been here on Easter too. I missed it, also, by about two thousand years. You and I have never lived at any time other than after Easter. And there's a kind of puzzlement about that. In a manner of speaking, we've never known anything firsthand other than "low Sunday," (and I'm not referring to the quality of preaching!) I'm simply being honest about the real distance between us and the first Easter.

Most of the time, here in church, we behave as if there were no distance. We sing about it, pray about it, and preach about it as if nothing could be more normal than a man who was crucified, dead and buried on Friday, walking forth from his grave, resurrected from the dead, on Sunday. In here, it makes sense. But out there, when we emerge from the glorious sounds and sights of this sanctuary into the clear light of day, we feel a great gap between our time and the time of Easter.

We wish we could have been there on Easter. Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb. But she did not believe until the risen Christ appeared and spoke to her directly. She told the disciples what she had seen, but they believed only when Jesus came and stood among them, showing them his scared hands and feet.

If we could not have been there on that Easter morning with Mary Magdalene, we at least wish we could have been there on Easter evening with the disciples. We wish that we had been there on that Easter evening; had seen his hands and side, and had felt his breath on our face. But we were not. And in that respect we are not like Mary Magdalene or ten of the eleven disciples. We are like Thomas.

Thomas did not make it out to the cemetery in the morning with Mary, nor was he there in the upper room behind locked doors with the other disciples. When they told him about the Easter appearances, Thomas said, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and

place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Seeing is believing. “Since I missed Easter and did not see for myself, how can I believe?” asked Thomas.

All of us who missed Easter should take note. Belief was not something that came to him naturally. And he wasn't very good at abstract thinking, metaphysics, harmonic convergence, astral projection or other weird notions. He needed to touch. He needed to experience for himself. What we expect Jesus to say to Thomas is something like he said to the man who wanted a sign from Jesus, “You people, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” (John 4:48) Instead, he asks, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

We expect Jesus really to sock it to Thomas, but he doesn't. We expect Jesus to say, “Tough luck, Thomas. You should've been here on Easter. Get over it.” But what Jesus does say to Thomas is, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.”

There is a connection made here between belief in the risen Christ and the scars of Christ. The risen Christ has scars. Being raised from the dead does not erase the scars. The Christ of Easter bears the scars made on Good Friday. Thomas, like the rest of the disciples, recognized the risen Christ only by seeing firsthand his scars. Easter, the stunning triumph of God, the great victory over death and defeat, does not erase the scars on Jesus..... or on us.

There are some folks who would have us believe that Christians should have nothing but peace and joy in their hearts. But I don't know any Christians like that. When I was four years old, I fell down on a flagstone step outside our home in Atlanta and cut my chin wide open. I was too young to remember much of the incident, but I have the scar to prove that it happened.

In his exalted form, Christ had the scars to prove his love for us. We all bear the scars of life, even as Christ did. The disciples did not recognize Jesus in his resurrected form. It was only when he showed them his scars that they knew him.

We shouldn't be too hard on Thomas. He may have simply been saying, “I won't believe that it's Jesus, unless I touch his scars because Jesus has wounds. - my wounds.” They knew him, I think, because the Jesus whom they loved did not hover above the heartache of the world; he embraced the pain, touched the sorrow, lived as we live, and died as we must die. They knew Him by his scars.

We've all got scars: some visible and some invisible. Our Risen Lord also has scars to prove his love for us. If you don't know Him, if you're not sure that you believe, he'll graciously show you his scars, “that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of

God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) Do we need proof? Do we think seeing is believing? Touch. See. Believe. Jesus gives us what we need. Interestingly enough, we aren’t told whether Thomas took Jesus up on his offer of proof. Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!”

Perhaps it was enough for Thomas just to know that Jesus cared, that Jesus did not reject his doubt. In offering himself to Thomas, Jesus blessed those who were not there on Easter. That means us. Jesus gave Thomas what he needed to believe. That’s the way Jesus handles doubt, says John. He gives us what we need. He will go to any length to help us believe.

I don’t know what you need. Maybe you don’t know what you need. Maybe what you need is for Jesus to slip through that closed door behind which you hide and say, “Peace.” Maybe what you need is for Jesus to say, “See these scars? They are the scars of the world that I willingly took so that you might be saved.” Maybe what you need is to know that Jesus accepts you and your scars just as you are. Maybe what you need is the assurance that Jesus will walk with you through every trial and turmoil you may face. Maybe what you need is the peace of Christ, which he offers to everyone who wasn’t there on Easter.

So we needn’t worry that we weren’t there on Easter because Easter is here for us. That’s what we need and what Jesus freely gives us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen