

II Easter 2026  
Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA  
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April 12, 2026

John 20: 19-31

We gather for worship on this Second Sunday of Easter amid the warm afterglow of Easter Day, collectively taking a deep breath after last Sunday's intense and joyful celebration

One preposition captures the ongoing glory of the season—today is the Second Sunday **of** Easter, not the first Sunday **after** Easter—we hear today about Jesus' appearing before the dispirited disciples

In these second and third resurrection appearances—the first was to Mary Magdalene at the tomb—Jesus performed spiritual CPR and breathed the Holy Spirit upon the frazzled disciples, he transforms Thomas' doubts and sends them forth as disciples into the world

The Fifty Days of Easter call us to the same movement: to allow God's full-throttle love to 'inspire' us—literally, to fill us with divine power—so that we might become witnesses in our daily lives

Today's Gospel text—the so-called Doubting Thomas story—combines high-energy fear, gut instinct and confession of faith as the frazzled disciples encounter their risen Lord

What does all this action, messy detail and hard-won hope tell us about our own lives and destinies as Easter Christians?

First, let's reflect on a few details from John's Easter Gospel before connecting the Good News to our own everyday lives

Our Gospel begins with wretched and cowering disciples who have locked themselves into a small room, filled with gloom and fear

Their best hopes have been dashed, their hero crushed, and now they blockade themselves against potential retribution

Whenever I read this story, I am filled with amazement by Jesus' own first words from the grave

Instead of damning the cowardly disciples or settling scores with those who abandoned him, Jesus' first words cry out, "Peace, Shalom," words that have deeply communal meaning for hope and reconciliation

Jesus then places resurrection Christianity in the framework of mission: "As my Father has sent me, so I send you"

No high-fives, no resting on laurels, no retribution; instead, Jesus provides resurrection wind in our souls and commissions us to a mission of gritty proclamation and Easter hope

So in rapid-fire succession, John provides us with powerful resurrection appearances that follow Mary Magdalene's visit to the empty tomb and precede next week's story about Jesus at the Sea of Tiberius in Galilee

Before we jump on the empowerment bandwagon, however, let's take a look at Thomas' unique encounter with the risen Lord

Thomas remains one of my heroes in the NT, and today he gets his brief moment of holy encounter while serving as a role model of faith for the ages

In philosophical language, we can rule out Thomas as a Platonist content to deal with divine abstractions

Very much an Aristotelian, Thomas wonderfully embodies the empirical materialist who must be able to measure, taste, touch and see before embracing it as reality and deeper truth

For Thomas, doubt serves not as neurotic defense but as pathway to deeper truth, because it strips away saccharine coating and breezy platitudes

Thomas would make a great lab scientist—let's hear some cheering from the scientists among us for your new patron saint—because Thomas embraces measured truth over fallible intuition

Like any good scientist, Thomas rejects easy bromides or irrational feelings that can lead us astray in favor of verifiable steps that leads to deeper knowledge

Jesus meets Thomas—like Jesus meets all of us—where Thomas lives

In perhaps the Bible's gutsiest move, Jesus invites Thomas to touch Jesus' wounded but resurrected body as a pathway to deeper belief

It does the trick and transforms Thomas toward a deeper level of faith, belief and proclamation

So Thomas provides an Easter encounter in miniature while standing as patron saint for empiricists, skeptics and those who refuse to be captured by facile or cheap talk

Thomas anticipates the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Paul Tillich's embrace of doubt as vehicle to faith in deeper, ultimate reality in *The Courage to Be*

Notice that the risen Lord betrays no impatience or irritation with Thomas' measured approach

A bit more visceral than some would need, Jesus lovingly takes Thomas by the hand and allows a gutsy experience of new life

Remember that John's Gospel is presumed to be the latest of the four gospels, written nearly a century after the events of Easter during a raging debate about the heresy of docetism, which argued that the bodily Jesus only 'seemed' to die and rise again

However carnal the encounter between Jesus and Thomas, it clearly transforms Thomas from curmudgeonly questioner to faithful confessor

The risen Christ meets us where we are, takes us by the hand and works through our baggage to produce transforming faith

Our Easter witness is filled with real disciples who had messed up, abandoned their Master, cowered in fear, and yet allowed themselves to be transformed by the awesome power of Christ's resurrection pulsating through their fragile yet grace-filled lives

Last Sunday, we encountered Mary Magdalene—a woman whose own story has filled so many vivid imaginations—who became frazzled at the empty tomb yet who was transformed and ran to shout the Good News to all who would hear

The motley disciples looked like complete losers as they locked themselves into a room and huddled in fear—yet the risen Christ's proclamation of forgiveness—"Peace be with you"—and his missionary pep talk—"As the Father sent me, so I send you"—gave them mettle in their spines and the energy to transform the world

In the past couple weeks, Pope Leo has been channeling this resurrection vision of reconciliation over retribution and peace over dominance as he—to put it politely—engages in dialogue with American leaders to champion dignity and diplomacy over dark obsessions with domination and lethality

How about you this week—have you put the Easter story back on the shelf like a beloved novel, or does resurrection power pulse through your veins and back into this terrible yet wonderful world?

Amid our personal pains, challenges and moral dilemmas—how do you allow the risen Christ to proclaim Shalom and redirect your life?

As a parish family, we work to serve as missionaries each and every day, welcoming and befriending the stranger as if he were Christ himself

At least on our best days, we embrace resurrection power and harness Easter belief to bring Good News amid crisis and to serve justice in a morally ambiguous world

We respect individual conscience and grappling with belief, we support those who risk sharing their unbelief, and we understand that people have different time-tables by which they can cry out, 'My Lord and my God'

We rejoice that engineers have one way of viewing the world while poets have another, and yet each can come to Christ in faithful ways amid the joyful spiritual diversity of this world

In our words, our actions, and our ministries, we tell each other and the world that we have encountered the risen Lord

But I hope you do exactly the same thing amid your own daily life: whether you are an ethereal Platonist or an empirical Thomist (as in Doubting Thomas), I hope you find your way to the living God, tap into resurrection power without hoarding it, and allow your very self to become a catalyst for holy love and reconciliation in this world

Let's end as John ends today's Gospel, paraphrasing only slightly:

The risen Christ comes into our lives amid all its craziness and rancor, Jesus beckons us to forgive/retain the sins of others and spread the Good News so that through believing we may have life in his name