

## introduction

*Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!  
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!*

-Charles Wesley, "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"

Easter is something completely new. Resurrection — not merely the reversal of death but a whole new kind of life — is so novel and unexpected that throughout the gospel stories, we see the disciples responding to Easter with everything from doubt to fear, disbelief, and wonder. And yet, as Jesus continues to prove himself to his disciples, showing himself to be the Risen Lord, they move from fear to joy, and from doubt to belief, and are finally sent to share Jesus' resurrection life with the whole world.



**Does the fact of Jesus' resurrection make a difference to your faith, or to your thoughts about Christianity?**

### read **John 20:19-31 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.**

## context

All of the gospel of John has been leading to the resurrection. It is foreshadowed in John 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” It is suggested a few verses later in John the Baptist’s identification of Jesus as both the Lamb of God (dying sacrifice) and God’s Chosen One (living victor) ([John 1:29, 34](#)). And it is predicted early on by Jesus himself when he says, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” ([John 2:19](#)). From the beginning of the story John is setting the stage for Easter. Yet, on the Sunday after his bloody crucifixion, Jesus’ disciples are hiding out, fearing they might be next, and with no expectation of a resurrection that would change everything.

## from fear to joy

In the first part of our passage, it is evening on the first Easter Sunday. Even though the women had met the risen Jesus at the tomb that morning, and even though two of the leading disciples had witnessed the empty tomb, the gathered group was afraid. They had good reason to be. What the authorities had done to Jesus, and what the authorities could easily do to his

disciples, was far more evident and believable than the assertion that Jesus had risen from the dead. So Jesus met his disciples' fear with his own presence. He appeared among them, saying "Peace be with you!" and he showed them where he had been pierced by the nails and the spear. And they were overjoyed. This is what resurrection does: it not merely restores something old, but it brings something entirely new. When their fear was replaced with joy, Jesus breathed on the disciples in anticipation of Pentecost and sent them into the world to proclaim the gospel. Jesus' summary statement in verse 22 about forgiving and retaining sin does not mean that the disciples are now in charge of personally forgiving sins. It means that they proclaim forgiveness through preaching the gospel, and those who believe are forgiven their sins, while those who disbelieve retain their sins. Jesus' resurrection moves his friends from fear to joy and finally to a mission to share their joy with the world.

*"Jesus' 'Shalom' on Easter evening is the complement of 'it is finished' on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted."*

—D.A. Carson

## discuss

- 1. Can you imagine yourself being a disciple in the upper room that evening? What fears and worries would you have, and how would you think about Jesus' own predictions and the stories from Easter morning?**
- 2. Jesus is so personal, warm, and loving with his disciples when he meets them, and they are "overjoyed" with him. Do we have that kind of personal, warm experience with Jesus today? Why or why not?**
- 3. How much do we really recall and rely on the sending power of the Holy Spirit in our roles as workers, friends, parents, students, and followers of Christ? How can we live in Jesus' power instead of our own?**

## from doubt to belief

The second part of this passage follows a week later. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, is not present when Jesus first appears. His friends tell him, “We have seen the Lord!” but Thomas responds with doubt. “Unless I see,” he says, “I will not believe.” So the next Sunday evening, as the disciples are gathered again, Jesus appears. In an act of great love and humility, Jesus invites Thomas to personally touch the nail holes in his hands, and to put his hand into Jesus’ side. This is all for Thomas’ benefit, who exclaims “My Lord and my God!,” and confirms the very first verse of John, “the Word was God.” Jesus then pronounces a benediction on those who, like us today, believe not because of what we’ve seen but because of what we’ve heard. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Then John, the gospel writer, steps back and shares the goal of his entire book, which is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Jesus came to bring life, and life more abundant, and he does this through belief grounded in his resurrection. Resurrection confirms his power over death, his death proclaims his payment for sin, and his life shows how he lived for us, and also the kind of resurrection life he calls us to live in him.

*“When you look at these two verses (20:30-31), the simple order is as follows: first evidence, then belief, and then life. So, life is the ultimate goal; John’s is a Gospel of life.”*

—Dick Lucas and William Philip

## discuss

- 4. How do you handle doubt in your own faith, or in your own questions about faith? How does your faith tradition handle doubts and questions? Compare and contrast with Jesus’ approach to Thomas.**

5. Our beliefs always shape our lives. Can you share examples of how belief in general can change your life? How does belief in Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God bring life? Consider both of Jesus' titles, and both kinds of life (both now and in eternity).

## group reflection

The sermon series from January to today has been about “who is Jesus?” And the scriptures contain many answers: Jesus is the Lord of creation, the bringer of joy, the compassionate healer, the humble servant, and the sacrifice for sin. But none of it matters very much unless he is also risen from the grave. With that in mind, read N.T. Wright’s passage below and consider what we can do to celebrate this risen Jesus, the Lord of Life. Easter is a 50 day season, so plan a party!

*“Easter week itself ought not to be the time when all the clergy sigh with relief and go on holiday. It ought to be an eight-day festival, with champagne served after morning prayer or even before, with lots of alleluias and extra hymns and spectacular anthems. Is it any wonder people find it hard to believe in the resurrection of Jesus if we don’t throw our hats in the air? Is it any wonder we find it hard to live the resurrection if we don’t do it exuberantly in our liturgies? Is it any wonder the world doesn’t take much notice if Easter is celebrated as simply the one-day happy ending tacked on to forty days of fasting and gloom?”*

—N.T. Wright

## upcoming

- Sunday, April 12 | **Church Family Meal, after service**  
*Contact [nicole.harris@redeemerws.com](mailto:nicole.harris@redeemerws.com) to help serve at one of the upcoming meals on your own or as a group.*
- Thursday, April 16 | **Discover Gotham, 6:30 pm**  
*Attend to meet others, ask questions, and learn more about Redeemer's 9-month faith and work discipleship cohort.*  
[faithandwork.com/events/discover-gotham-info-night-session/](https://faithandwork.com/events/discover-gotham-info-night-session/)
- Sunday, April 19 | **New at RWS, 1:15 pm**  
*New to our church? Attend this class to learn more about our church's vision and mission and connect with staff.*  
[redeemerws.com/new](https://redeemerws.com/new)