

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 12, 2026 – SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Faith, Hope, and Love—Sharing the Mercy of God*”

Acts 2:14a, 22-32 (Peter preaches about Christ being raised from the dead)
Psalm 16 (The Lord is our protector and refuge)
1 Peter 1:3-9 (Christ has given us new life and a living hope)
St. John 20:19-29 (Thomas meets the risen Lord)

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” While that skepticism may alert us to scammers and scoundrels, it contradicts the Gospel message. The world says, “I have to see it to believe it.” But according to Scripture (Hebrews 11:11), “*faith* is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen*.” [Emphasis added] In today’s Gospel, Thomas—one of Jesus’ closest disciples—is struggling with one foot in the world’s way of demanding proof, and his other foot in the faith he has learned from spending time with the Lord.

But first, we have to back up a week, to the Day of Resurrection, when, seeking one another’s comfort and protection, Jesus’ grieving, frightened disciples had locked themselves away in hiding. Then, suddenly, Jesus appears, fully present among them, nail-scarred but alive, loving, and all-powerful.

In that first post-resurrection encounter, Jesus had only one word for his startled (and terrified) followers: “*Shalom*.” Our lectionary translates that as “Peace.” But in Hebrew, the word connotes a greater wholeness and healing that comes from the conscious harmony of neighbor with neighbor and neighbors together with God. Jesus spoke His *shalom* over them as a promising word of grace, offering an invitation to be one with Him as He is one with us. When we experience this wondrous peace of *shalom* that only Christ can provide, we become naturally forgiving because we want *everyone* to experience that same wholeness and peace.¹

But for Thomas—who was not present at Jesus’ first post-resurrection appearance—his friends’ experience of the risen Christ sounded too good to be true. He had difficulty believing that Jesus’ gruesome death and His followers’ profound disillusionment could both be upended so quickly in a “happily ever after” conclusion. Unable to accept their cheerful escapism, Thomas needed to know how the unbelievable brutality he had witnessed could be nullified. Unlike those who turn their heads from suffering, he had to see for himself how mortal wounds could be transfigured. He needed to *experience* the living Christ; no amazing report could convince him. We too, can only come to faith through experiencing the living Christ. Others telling us about Him is not enough.

The risen Lord must have loved Thomas’ skepticism. In a sort of “the deeper the doubt, the deeper the faith” perspective, Jesus appreciated Thomas’ desire to dive into the mystery. Thus, He invites Thomas to actually *touch* His wounds, to acknowledge graphically the unthinkable evil that had occurred, and to encounter God’s gracious response of the forgiveness that gives life, and life eternal.

Those artworks that depict Thomas with his finger stuck in Jesus’ side where the Roman soldier had pierced Him with a spear? Not true to the Gospel account! Thomas *never actually touches* the risen Lord. Because, after Jesus says to Him, “Do not doubt but believe,” Thomas falls down and worships Him, crying out in certain faith, “My Lord and my God!” Here is no “doubting Thomas.” Here is a follower of Jesus who had legitimate questions, and whose uncertainty was met with acceptance by our Lord. The message for us? It’s OK not to have all the answers. Just keep believing with whatever measure of faith you have, and God will fill in the rest, eventually.

St. John's account of the risen Christ's second appearance to His disciples is that evangelist's version of Pentecost. Mirroring God's breathing the breath of life into Adam, Christ breathed over them. His breath filled them with the Holy Spirit so that they could grow into living answers to Jesus' final prayer on earth: "That they may be one as you Father are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21a). United as one, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they would carry the Gospel message to the ends of the earth.

Part of that message which so desperately needed to be shared was the *mercy* of God. In our reading today from First Peter 1:3, we hear an expression of awe at God's mercy—that which we receive from God without deserving it. The writer exclaims that the mercy of God is so great that it births us into a *living hope*. And that living hope *is* our risen Lord Jesus Christ!

The word used in the New Testament to express the mercy of God may be one of the few Greek words many of Episcopalians know: "*éleos*." We sing a variant of this whenever we pray, "*Kyrie eleison*," Lord, have mercy. While we generally think of this prayer in the Penitential Rite as a plea for forgiveness, the word actually asks for God's loving and active solidarity with us. In the Penitential Rite and in the Agnus Dei, we're asking God—in His mercy—to act on His divine desire to relieve whatever misery we and our world are suffering.

As we celebrate this second Sunday of Easter, the lectionary urges us to believe what 'sounds too good to be true.' Easter proclaims that we, the motley communities of our family, neighborhood, parish, church, and world, can live in such a way that others will see the wonders and signs of God's coming kingdom. Enlivened with Christ's life-giving Spirit and filled with faith, hope, and love, we can be witnesses of God's mercy through the way we share and care for others. Although evil abounds in so many ways, we can be bearers of living hope, people who exemplify the future in Christ, and who point to the full transfiguration of Creation through God's absolute justice and merciful love.

Like Thomas, we *can* believe the Gospel—the good news of our crucified and risen Lord—and make that real in our world by how we live. And, as we share God's mercy with others, we can live in a way that is *so good and life-giving* it can only be true! The 1989 song "Love Changes Everything"—from Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "Aspects of Love"—could be a modern expression of how merciful love affects us: "Nothing in the world will ever be the same," says the song. Indeed, now that Christ is Risen and lives in us, "nothing in the world *will* ever be the same!"

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that there are times when we, like Thomas, are more doubters than believers. We tend to question Your love for us when we witness repression, wars, violence and death, the destruction of nature, unexplained sickness, and hatred among people. Help us to recognize our complicity in such evils through our own selfishness, greed, and foolish admiration for the spirits of dominance, power, and prestige.

Through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, help us to understand Your sacrificial love for us, so that assisted by Your grace, we may love one another as You have loved us. Help us to learn from the courage of Jesus to take up *our* cross and stand against injustice and oppression. Enlighten us with Your Holy Spirit of Wisdom, as, in celebrating Christ's resurrection, we may rise again and again to bring justice, love, and peace to this world so greatly in need of all these signs of God's kingdom. This we pray in the Name of our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*²

¹ Adapt. Mary McGlone, "April 12, 2026: The Second Sunday of Easter," 23 March 2026, [National Catholic Reporter online](https://www.ncronline.org/spirituality/scripture-life/april-12-2026-second-sunday-easter) <https://www.ncronline.org/spirituality/scripture-life/april-12-2026-second-sunday-easter> 4 April 2026.

² Adapt. "Prayer of Confession for Transformation and New Life," 16 April 2023, [United Church of Christ](https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/easter-2a-april-16/) <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/easter-2a-april-16/> 4 April 2026.