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# The Second Sunday of Easter

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Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

This past week, I was able to take a post-Holy Week vacation and visit some of my family in Tucson, Arizona. My parents live there, as well as my brother, sister-in-law, and two nephews, Henry and Howie. They all get to spend a lot of time together, face-to-face, in the flesh, but I usually FaceTime with them on Saturday or Sunday of any given week for some virtual face-to-face time.

Now, my nephew Howie is a rather precocious, intelligent, and clever eight-year-old. A few years ago, I had a similar experience of being able to see him and the family after Easter. Howie was about four years old then. I recall that my family tried to take Howie to the local shopping mall to see the Easter Bunny. But Howie objected to this trip. When my brother asked him why he didn't want to go see the Easter Bunny, Howie replied calmly and matter-of-factly: "That's not the real Easter Bunny — it's just a guy in a suit." Just a guy in a suit. He feels the same way about the Santa Claus at their local shopping mall — maybe he's seen the movie *Elf* too many times! He knows Santa Claus exists — of course Santa does — but the imposter by them is, as well, just a guy in a suit. Howie believes in the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus even though he's never seen them; and "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." But Howie knows an imposter when he sees one.

The apostle Thomas has inherited a bad rap. He's often referred to as "Doubting Thomas" simply for his own desire to see the real, risen Christ for himself, face-to-face, and to confirm that he too was more than just a guy dressed up in a suit, or maybe a robe. In Thomas's defense, he didn't ask for anything unique that the other disciples hadn't experienced. He himself simply longed for a personal encounter with the risen Christ, proof for himself in the flesh that the one whom the others had seen wasn't an imposter.

That first Easter evening must have surely been an emotional rollercoaster for all the first followers of Jesus. They had been through a truly traumatic week, to say the least. Their Teacher, Messiah, and Friend, who just a week early had entered into the Holy City in Triumph, had been betrayed and executed by the Roman Empire in the most gruesome manner. And early

on that first day of a new week, a few days later on that first Easter, Mary Magdalene had returned from the empty tomb and announced to the other disciples: "I have seen the Lord!" But just like Thomas later that evening, the other disciples didn't believe her testimony because they hadn't seen Jesus for themselves. As an aside, it seems not much has changed in the past two thousand years when it comes to men not believing what women have to say, unfortunately. But back to our story. For all those disciples knew, this "Jesus" Mary Magdalene had seen was just an imposter, a guy in a suit. And so that first Easter evening, they remained locked away in fear of the religious and political authorities, who they assumed would probably be coming for them next to round up and punish the rest of Jesus' followers. But, that evening, the risen Christ came among them, shared his peace with them, showed them his wounded hands and side, and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. The disciples' fear turned to great joy!

Now here lies the rub. Thomas wasn't with the other disciples that night, for whatever reason. I do wonder what he was doing. Maybe he was out looking for Jesus himself? John's Gospel doesn't fill in that detail, but for whatever reason, Thomas was not present for that appearance. Do you know the phrase "FOMO?" If not, it stands for "fear of missing out." It's the anxiety you experience when others have had an experience that you've missed out on. You see on Facebook or Instagram or Snapchat that all your friends went to the movies or the pub or the beach or the mountains... without you! It seems to me that Thomas suffered himself from some major FOMO. First, Mary Magdalene had seen the risen Christ. Then, Jesus had appeared to the rest of the disciples minus Thomas. All of Jesus' closest followers and friends had an encounter with the risen Christ, but Thomas had missed out. Imagine the anxiety, regret, and jealousy! All poor Thomas wanted was the same experience everyone else had all had. Can you blame him? He simply wanted a face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ, an opportunity to know for certain, for himself, that the one the others had seen was more than just a guy in a suit. He wasn't necessarily "doubting" Thomas. He was certainly a faithful disciple. He simply longed for a personal encounter with the risen Lord.

I imagine Thomas a bit like my nephew Howie. He might have believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, he simply

desired the experience that the others were afforded. He wanted to know that they had seen the real Jesus. He need confirmation. Maybe, when the others were locked away in fear, he had been out faithfully searching every shopping mall in Jerusalem to find the real Jesus. Maybe he was, in fact, faithful and courageous Thomas! He would have known the real Christ when he saw him. Imposters dressed up in suits or costumes don't bear the scars of proof.

Here's where we all come in. We, unlike the disciples, walk by faith and not by sight. Like my nephew Howie who has a child's sure faith in the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, even though he's never seen them, we too profess a faith in a risen Lord whom we have not seen. Or have we?

If we pay attention, I believe Jesus is still appearing today, often in unexpected places, behind walls of fear, surprising us with peace, transforming dread into joy, and showing us new life. He meets us here in this place, in water and word, in bread and wine, in the face of neighbor, friend, family, and guest. We gather week in and week out and in sharing the peace of Christ and receiving the bread and wine, we share in the risen life of Christ.

Furthermore, we meet Christ outside these walls in the world. We see Christ in the face of neighbor and stranger. As Pastor Heidi Neumark wrote in the *Christian Century*, we meet Christ in the children seeking asylum at our southern border, survivors of unspeakable violence who, like Christ, present their wounded and scarred bodies as testimony. We meet Christ in the person who is hungry and comes to the soup kitchen. We meet Christ in the unhoused person we see on the Boston Common. We meet Christ in the prisoner — either those physically in prison or those imprisoned by mental illness, anxiety, depression, or addiction — whom we visit. When we are mindful of the presence of Christ in each other, we behold the face of our risen Lord. Where have you seen Christ? In whom have you met Christ? Have you walked on by, or have you greeted the risen Lord?

In these ways and so, so many more, we see the risen Christ, and we join with Thomas in exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" — more than just a guy in a suit.

Thanks be to God.