

## Sermons for the Journey

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Easter 2 – Year B

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### “I Can Only Imagine”

Thomas has been with Jesus throughout the Lord's active ministry; he has witnessed many, if not all, of the miracles: walking on water, healing the blind, feeding the 5000, the change of water into wine. He's seen it all, but this resurrection bit is of a different sort altogether. A general resurrection for all believers at the end of time, fine; but a newly en fleshed bodily resurrection in the middle of time, not so easy. Like most everyone else in first century Jerusalem, Thomas had passed Greek-Roman-Jewish biology: dead men don't rise. Certainly the Romans had proved decisively that dead would-be messiahs and political upstarts don't rise. When you're nailed to a cross, you are dead and you stay dead. But Thomas has forgotten the signs, the signs that trump first century (or any other century) biology and crucifixion; Thomas has also failed to imagine the full implications of the possibility that Jesus has risen, that's it's not a matter of just another miracle. Thomas fails to imagine the possibility of “new creation in place of decay, new peace in place of war.” As the poet Steven Turner wrote, such an event as the resurrection is “not good for people of a nervous disposition.”

Then again, perhaps Thomas had recognized an implication I hadn't considered, one pointed out by the novelist Frederick Buechner: “that this body, or some new and terrible version of it, would start to breathe again, stand up in its grave clothes and move toward [him] with unspeakable power.” Perhaps that is at the heart of Thomas's blindness, fear, and doubt; perhaps that is crucial also for me, for you. If this event truly occurred, what might it mean for me and how I live my life? What might Jesus ask of me at this age when I might really desire that he ask nothing more at all? And so Thomas hedges his bet with an “Unless.” It has been suggested that the “Unless” speaks for the world. However, Professor Kent Hughes suggests that the world's attitude is much more like “Show me the facts, and I'll invent another theory.” Is it possible that Thomas's blindness is my blindness and that I am looking for some way to hedge my bet, some way to suggest to Jesus that I've done my part and that there is nothing more to give? But Thomas's “Unless” is met by Jesus with an invitation: see, touch. If this is what you want, well, here it is, a kind of “I'll meet you on your grounds if you can't come to mine.” And that offer brings into speech a confession that Tom Wright notes has been “trembling on the edge” and now comes “blurting out”: “My Lord and my God.” No longer blind, Thomas sees and believes and blessed is he, but blessed also are we who do not see and yet believe, who refuse to rest and choose to follow Jesus wherever he leads. The resurrection of Jesus is not the end of the story; rather, it is the awesome,

amazing, shocking beginning, an event so cataclysmic that through belief in Jesus you and I may have life in his name.

And that is why I included the anecdote and the song in this morning's Chalice. To blurt out as Thomas did, "My Lord and my God," without having seen Jesus is a step into the realm of imagining not merely the possibility but the actuality of the risen Jesus by your side, of movement from the realm of maybe into the realm of fact, of beholding the son of God saying "You are my beloved child and I will lead you into loving light." The secularist skeptic cannot imagine this, let alone behold it, but you and I are meant to know what it means to be surrounded by God's glory, to be "fresh and pure as water from a well, our hands made new to handle holy things," to enter into the dance with the Lord of the Dance, to sing "Lord of lords and King of kings, and he shall reign for ever and ever" accompanied by joyful "Alleluias."

I'm 76 and I'm just beginning to imagine what it will be like to walk by his side, to grasp what it means to behold Jesus face to face, to feel Jesus' risen power unleashed in me. I often wonder what my life would have been like if I had begun to grasp this a long time ago. But when I speculate like that, I remind myself of some sage advice administered again and again in some children's stories that I have read over and over: "No one is ever told what would have happened, but you can find out what will happen." Imagine what the truth of Easter can do for you if you embrace it, if you can blurt out "My Lord and my God," if you set free the power of the risen Christ in your life. As Tom Wright says, "Easter is the beginning of God's new world [and] we new-creation people are to fill our lungs with Jesus' powerful breath, to fill our minds with the truth of his resurrection, to fill our hearts with love for him and his world," and, I might add, to baptize our imaginations so that we can behold the glory that awaits us, so that we might "go out, not knowing where we shall go or what we shall do, but only that a new day has begun which will never end."