

*“Now It Springs Forth”*

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 7

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures:            Isaiah 43: 18-21    John 20: 19-31

**Isaiah 43: 18-21**

18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches;

for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,

21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

**John 20: 19-31**

### *Jesus Appears to the Disciples*

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, 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 his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

### *Jesus and Thomas*

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them 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 mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

### *The Purpose of This Book*

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

***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”***

A Christian Church in a neighboring city

felt like God was doing so many new things with them

that someone in the membership hung a hand-made  
sign

over the front door that read, “SHIFT  
HAPPENS”.

Yes, shift happens.

Change happens.

Grace happens.

The love of God enters in and suddenly we become a happening.

God is doing new things in our faith walk and faith community,  
and then saying,

*“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things  
of old.*

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you  
not perceive it?*

(Isaiah 43: 18-19)

Here is a loving Word for those who have not seen and yet believe.

One day Thomas the Twin made an amazing spiritual connection

one that became for him a new beginning,

a starting point, a spring board into new life and  
faith,

an eye-opening experience which helped  
him to see life in new light.

Thomas the Twin was with the disciples,

hiding from the authorities after the crucifixion.

They were “in the house with the doors shut...and Jesus came in.”

They were afraid.

The point here is not their fear of the Jewish authorities

but that the doors were shut and Jesus Christ came in.

There is nowhere you can go or be or shut yourself in that Jesus  
Christ cannot enter.

You may be lonely or afraid, in prison or in a hospital,

in an isolated country home or in a city of several million,

and Jesus Christ will enter in and say to you,  
“Shalom. Peace be with you.”

In fact, Jesus is saying this to us all the time.

Wherever you are, whenever you can,

open your ears and your heart and you will hear the Living  
Christ say unto you,

“Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Thomas -- the same Thomas who had doubted the resurrection,

the same one who questioned what others had seen,

the same one to whom Christ spoke the truth  
with love --

Christ for himself

faith,

and confessed his new-found  
saying, “My Lord and  
my God!”

***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”***

Over the centuries the Church of Jesus Christ has been hard on Thomas.

Thomas the Twin has been given the unfortunate nickname of Doubting Thomas.

Sometimes when someone is unsure of spiritual convictions and raises doubts aloud,

he or she might be called Thomas.

Rather than being harsh on Thomas the Twin for doubting and then believing,

we could instead celebrate his spiritual honesty,

emulate the authenticity of his questions;

and dare to identify the common ground we've shared with him

at various points in our lives.

Frederick Buechner writes:

*“Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God,*

*if you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep.*

*Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.”*[\[1\]](#)

May this sanctuary be host and home for people who doubt and believe,

who question and wonder,

who seek the One they are not at all convinced  
exists,

and knock at the very door that terrifies  
them.

And believe you me, church can be a very scary place.

We had one gentlemen walk around this physical plant three times  
one Sunday

to generate the courage he needed to walk in.

He was so nervous that morning he had a black shoe and a brown  
shoe.

Praise God that he was so well received that he came back again  
and again,

and in time grew to become a servant leader.

Jesus responds to Thomas and speaks to the disciples then and  
today, saying,

***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”***

Blessed are YOU who have not seen the risen Christ and yet you  
know Him.

Blessed are you who are water-washed and Spirit-born.

Blessed are you who confess your sins and are born again, and

again, and again.

Blessed are you who are considering and contemplating

becoming washed anew by the loving power of the Spirit of God.

May God lead you and listen to your innermost questions and doubts and faith.

May you speak aloud your own confession

as Thomas did when he said, "*My Lord and my God!*"

The Church is commissioned to bring people to Christ.

May we leave behind the lonely days of pole fishing

and welcome the fun of casting our nets far and wide.

But let's leave the cleaning of the catch to Christ. He is so much more adept!

And let's relieve one another of the pressure

to convince or persuade anyone else from disbelief

into believing what you have experienced of the grace of God.

William Willimon says,

"I do not think our job is to argue disbelieving people into belief in resurrection.



I think we have got to live lives of discipleship

that make no sense if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.”

“There is no absolute, irrefutable, unassailable “proof” of resurrection.

Even after the resurrection some of Jesus’ own disciples doubt.”

“Jesus does not trouble them or himself about their doubts. [Should we?]

Rather Jesus turns to them and commands them:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Then Jesus sends out his disciples to the far corners of the earth,

not with arguments about the truth,

not with proofs and evidence of a bodily resurrection,

but rather as those whose presence, whose actions,

whose love, whose speech, whose kindness and care,

whose being and sharing of the Good News

is the only “proof” of  
the resurrection.”[2]

***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”***

The back page of my Bible has a hard-to-decipher handwritten note that reads:

*“I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.”*

“A woman was asked to serve her church by working with the youth of her congregation.

She thought the idea so completely absurd.

She had no experience in working with young people.

She suspected that she had few talents for this sort of ministry.

[However] she prayed about it

and decided to overcome her doubts and her fears

and do the best she could to work with the youth.

That was ten years ago.

The youth ministry that she created is famous all over her town

as being a model of how youth ministry ought to be done.

“Funny,” she said to a friend, “those kids have strengthened my faith.

They have revealed Jesus to me in ways that I never could have imagined.

I have more faith now than I did at the beginning.

I simply went, did as I was told, and on my way, discovered the Jesus I never knew.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Take heart. Be brave. Live boldly into both your doubts and your faith:

the Jesus you may have never known is about to do a new thing.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

<sup>[1]</sup> Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking, Page 20.

<sup>[2]</sup> William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resource, Vol. 39. No. 2. P. 24. Portions adapted for this sermon.

<sup>[3]</sup> Willimon, *Ibid.*