Happy Easter! It’s good to see you here today on this second Sunday of Easter!! After Easter Sunday, we sometimes come back to church expecting something like business as usual. But nothing could be further from the case—there is so much more! The death and resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece of the Christian faith, and the liturgical year devotes seven weeks to the Easter season, culminating in Pentecost. Importantly, the Sundays of this season are referred to not as Sundays after Easter, but as Sundays of Easter, Sundays fully shaped & embedded in the Easter gospel. For fifty days, the church lives into the reality of the resurrection, of what it means to be a community shaped by the dying and rising of Christ, by the expectation-shattering reality of life victorious over death.

The lesson from John shows us that it is not easy to live into the reality of Easter. The commentary in Feasting on the Word points out that everything in our pre-Easter experience makes it difficult for us to embrace fully this good news. Even though Mary has told the disciples that very morning that she has seen the risen Lord (20:18), the disciples are huddled behind closed doors, afraid of those who have power over them. They do not live boldly and empowered by a new reality, but like cowards. To this cowering group of disciples, Jesus comes and reveals himself, giving them his peace (vv. 19,21), commissioning them to share in his ministry (v. 21), commissioning them to share in his ministry (v. 21), empowering them with the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 22). On the basis of this experience, the disciples announce to Thomas (as Mary previously had to them), “We have seen the Lord.” And Thomas does not believe them (v. 25).

This story from John is familiar to us, and many others, as the story of...
There is so much more to the story than the disciple who had his doubts and has been, perhaps, unfairly singled out. The disciples have already experienced the Risen Christ and Thomas had not been present. So he’s trying to catch up and has his doubts, as many of us do when confronted by a seemingly impossible, but hoped for, event.

What is noteworthy about this story for us today is not that Thomas insists on his own firsthand experience but that one week after the disciples have been visited by the risen Jesus and received Jesus’ peace and the Holy Spirit, they have once again locked themselves away behind closed doors. Thomas actually is one step ahead of these disciples—he only wants what they already have received—but the disciples have received and still do not live as an Easter people.

The Easter miracle of John 20:19-31, and the heart of this lesson, is that Jesus comes again and again to these scared and confused disciples. The disciples have not warranted a second visit by Jesus, but they get one, and a renewed gift of his peace (v. 26). Thomas is given exactly what he has requested—a chance to see and touch Jesus for himself. The story does not tell us that Thomas did touch Jesus, but Thomas touching Jesus is not what’s important! The point is Jesus’ offer of himself, over and over again, to people who long to see him. With no questions asked Jesus offers himself and gives the repeated gift of his presence and his peace. This is so much more than we could dream possible or deserve and it was given freely and with much love by Jesus to the disciples and now, to us. This is the good news for the Second Sunday of Easter!!!

Neither Jesus or the disciples is unusual for being afraid, wanting more, needing more, demanding more. The Easter gospel turns the world upside down, but we live out our days in right-side-up realities. So we are invited back into the
is nothing to be praised about the conduct of any of the disciples to whom Jesus appears—they live in fear even in the face of the Easter proclamation but to whom Jesus comes anyway and comes repeatedly. Easter is real, not simply in the triumphant celebrations of the week before, but as it unfolds in the lives and stories of disciples who are regularly tempted by fear and despair.

Our text today paints a vivid picture of the disciples, of their needs and wants, while at the same time portraying the risen Jesus in all the abundance of his grace. We can boldly proclaim the good news of Easter, knowing that in the face of the disciples’ fears that Jesus’ grace increases. Jesus didn’t lecture the disciples for hiding behind closed doors even after they had received the Spirit, and he didn’t censure Thomas for wanting the tactile experience of the risen Lord. The stories are parables of grace, even for those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

There is so much more to Easter than Easter Day. There is so much more than the renewal of life and hope. There is so much more to Easter than fifty days of the message that life goes on. Because Eastertide is fundamentally about our confession that Jesus is God, made flesh, not only for those frightened first disciples locked behind closed doors more than two thousand years ago, but for us today, for you and me, and every person sitting in our sanctuary.

The amazing good news is God is STILL sending Jesus to show us we are forgiven people who are acceptable to God. The good news is that because of the grace shown in Jesus Christ, we are acceptable to God beyond our wildest imaginations. We are acceptable, warts and all, with all our failures, mistakes, even intentional acts of harm that we inflict upon others. Nothing we can ever do will
in Jesus Christ. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we say in the prayer for Holy Communion: Hear the Good News! Christ died for our sins while we were yet sinners. This proves God’s love for us. This proves God’s acceptance of us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Glory to God!!

When I was having breakfast with the Methodist Men’s group yesterday morning, I mentioned that I needed to head back to my study to finish today’s sermon as it was only 2/3 done. As you can imagine, I walked right into the comment that it was probably already enough. Guess they didn’t want “so much more” as the sermon title indicates. So just let me finish with a little bit more about Easter and Holy Communion.

Jesus said that his teachings were like newly-fermented wine, so new and effervescent that this good news cannot be contained in the old wineskins of the old-time religion. Perhaps John had something like this in mind when he told the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana. The earthenware jars held water for the “rites of purification” (John 2:6). This was the ceremonial water which was used in certain purifying rites. In changing the water into wine, perhaps John saw the transformation of the old ritualism into a new, spirit-filled vision. It is significant that Jesus begins his ministry in John, not with a sermon, a lecture, or even some good works of healing, exorcism, or enlightenment. He begins at a place as rowdy and joyful as a wedding, with something so shocking and frivolous as turning water into wine to pick up a sagging party.

Once again, this Messiah bursts the boundaries of our small notions of God,
Unlike the disciples of the so serious John the Baptist with their long faces and sad looks, Jesus comes eating and drinking and partying. He agrees that bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life (Eccles. 10:19).

While not denying the demonic and twofold natures of our eating and drinking, while not overlooking our tendency to use even the best of God’s gifts for our own selfish ends, Jesus invites us to eat, drink and be merry. While not denying the sadness, the pain, the hurt of the world, he gathers up all that and puts it in a new perspective. He throws a party, inviting those who suffer and hurt and hunger. He thus fulfills the prophets’ hope that Israel would see a day when the vats shall overflow with wine (Joel 2:24), when all of God’s hungry ones will be filled with good things. That day is now.

To all those who cry with the psalmist, My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God (Psalm 42:2a), Jesus gives an invitation to his feast of life with the thundering words,

*I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.* -John 6:35

This gracious invitation puts all our eating and drinking in proper perspective. No longer need we fill ourselves in selfish gluttony, stuffing our faces in a vain attempt to fill our empty hearts. No longer need we drink ourselves into dizzy stupors in attempts to take away the pain, to relieve the hurt, to make ourselves forget. We are loved! Our God has come to us. Our God prepares a table for us in the midst of our enemies and invites us to the head table at the feast.

After a glimpse of this glory at the wedding at Cana or in the upper room or on the way to Emmaus or before the Lord’s table in our own church, we
same way. To eat and drink with the Lord at
His table illumines all our meals. Our morning breakfast is no longer the
eggs and bacon and soggy cornflakes of the humdrum and the routine; it is trans-
formed into a banquet to be eaten with glad and generous hearts. The morning
coffee break, the noonday snack on the assembly line, the sandwich between
mowing the hayfields, the evening meal around the family dinner table—all can
be done to the glory of God, in response to this glory which is revealed to us in
our eating and drinking. All eating can be Eucharistic—in joy and thanks! They
said to him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” (John 6:34).
Please pray with me. Lord, you come along, changing insipid water into rich,
bloodred wine; turning this funeral into a banquet; convincing us once again that
life is better than death, that the spirit should be let loose, that joy is the serious
business of heaven. We see once again that the sad and somber Holy Communion
is an affront to the presence of the risen Christ. There is a lot of new wine here,
bursting the old wineskins of tried, respectable religion. Help us to see your glory,
in joy and thanks for your precious gifts to us. Amen and amen.