

That Never-Ending Refrain....

[Text - John 20:19-31]

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O.K., it's confession time. You don't have to raise your hand, simply acknowledge the truth in your heart-of-hearts. This past week, did any of you say, or think, "Thank God Easter is over!"? I know you're out there! Every year I hear that refrain from people who are relieved that the stressful Easter Dinner is done; that the extended-family's over-extended stay is over; that the sugar-saturated, candy-crushing kids are back in school. Now, *I* must confess, that I hear the "Thank God Easter is over!" mantra, mostly from other *ministers* - Church leaders who are so relieved that the pressure leading-up to Easter has finally subsided. It's really rather sad. For while there are certain things in Life that we must struggle through, and then breathe a sigh of relief when they're finally over - thank goodness, Easter isn't one of them! Thank God, Easter is *never* over!

In the Church calendar, there are still six more weeks of Easter [and no, it's not because Jesus saw his shadow]! The celebration of Easter continues, because Jesus passed through the shadow of death, into the Light of Divine Life and Love. And the message of Easter is that the same Divine Life and Love which Jesus Christ experiences and embodies, endures from generation to generation. Therefore, there is nothing - in Life *or* Death - that can ever separate us from our Divine Source. The *continuous* Good News of Easter reminds us that even if our faith in God wavers or falls short, God's faithfulness to us remains constant and everlasting!

On that 1st Easter evening, when Thomas misses that initial, faith-enhancing experience, the story doesn't end there: Jesus Christ comes back for him! Jesus finds a way to reach-out to

Thomas, so that he may also believe the Good News; and that through believing, his life and hope and joy might be restored. And just as Jesus doesn't disparage Thomas for having his doubts, you and I certainly aren't penalize for having ours. The Good News of Easter reveals that our lives are not redeemed by our religious *beliefs*; our lives are redeemed and renewed by our *faith* - by our trusting in the unfailing power of Divine Life and Love. Because when you and I truly trust that the Sacred Source of All Things is Good and Gracious and Compassionate, then we are inspired and empowered to live Life to its fullest and best.

The never-ending Good News of Easter also means that you and I don't need to base our faith solely on something that happened centuries ago. Our faith is about trusting in the *continuing* action of the Holy One - in the here-and-now. After all, it's been nearly 2,000 years since the last witnesses of the Risen Christ died; yet through all those years, the Christian Faith has continued to live and grow and evolve. I have never seen the Risen Christ, yet I trust that Jesus Christ is alive and active in this world today. That trust comes, in part, because of the testimonies of those first followers; but more so because of the dramatic way in which their lives changed after those reported encounters.

Additionally, my faith is fortified significantly when I see the impact of the Living Christ in the lives of people today - from the baptism of a baby, to the growing faith of our youth; from character and caring of our young families, to the active commitment of our long-time members. In other words, I see and experience the Risen Christ in and through this living, loving Body of Christ! And the more deeply you and I share our lives and our faith with one another, and with others, the more clearly Christ's living impact is revealed among us.

On that first Easter evening, Thomas may not have shared with the others the experience of seeing the Risen Christ; yet they gladly shared that experience with him. And even though he found their story *unbelievable*, he still valued their friendship and trusted their sincerity - which is why he was still with them one week later. They also were able to accept Thomas' blunt skepticism, and hang-in-there with him, as together they tried to figure-out what their various experiences might mean.

In the coming weeks of this Easter Season, our Scripture readings will continue to convey that growing confidence and faith which develops as those early believers are touched and transformed by Christ's Living Presence. My hope is that we, too, will experience a growing faith in the Presence of Risen Christ among us:

A faith that will touch and transform our way of thinking and living.

A faith that will assure us that we are loved and valued, thereby empowering us to love and value others.

A faith that will raise-up our spirits, and send us into the world as Spirit-filled witnesses of the *Good News* of Jesus Christ.

You and I may not have Jesus' ability to walk through walls or tightly locked doors; but we certainly have the ability to throw-open those doors, knock-down those walls, and break-through those barriers that would prevent others from seeing and experiencing the Living, Loving Christ. Just like Jesus, you and I have the capacity to warmly welcome the outsider, to lift-up the oppressed, to help the afflicted, to forgive those who do us wrong, and to live joyful, meaningful and abundant lives. This is the Good News of Easter! This is the Love that never ends - It just goes on and on my friends... And for that we can all say "Thank God Easter is *never over!*"