

The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 12, 2015  
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## Two Beginnings

For St. John there are two beginnings. First is the beginning of all creation, which we hear about in the first verse of John's Gospel, "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...*" Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is the fulfillment of creation. His birth witnesses to the God of all creation, the God of love in every created life. Each newborn infant reflects divine love coming into the world through a newly-created life.

The second beginning is eternal life, resurrected life, the "*word of life*" triumphing over sin and death. This begins with the Risen Christ appearing ten different times over forty days in Jerusalem and in Galilee. John writes in his first letter, "*From the beginning we have heard... we have seen... we have touched... this life was revealed... eternal life...*" Christ's resurrection was both spiritual and physical, much like his earthly life was spiritual and physical. In the Incarnation and in the Resurrection Jesus is the perfect union of the divine and the human.

John wrote or possibly dictated his Gospel and three letters some fifty years after the Resurrection. Two generations of believers had shared the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Tens of thousands came to believe. This "*fellowship*" had grown from Jerusalem and spread across the Roman Empire – to north Africa, to Turkey, Greece, Italy, into Europe, perhaps even to Spain and Britain.

It had all begun on Easter Sunday. Jesus, risen from the dead, came to his ten disciples and said, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you..., receive the Holy Spirit.*" The disciples were not really sure how Jesus could rise from the dead, just as we are not sure how Jesus could rise from the dead. They didn't always immediately recognize him. They returned to Galilee to try to recover their lives, but he appeared there as well, eating with them, teaching them, encouraging their mission to the world.

On the fortieth day he disappeared physically from their sight. He "*ascended to heaven.*" Whatever that means? The reality of his physical presence had come to an end. Although he gave his disciples the Holy Spirit in some new way on the first Easter Day, he told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for a fuller manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. So a week and a half after his Ascension, at Pentecost in Jerusalem, hundreds – maybe thousands – received this new power of Christ's Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus had told his disciples on the night before his death, "*later you will understand,*" so the first generations of Christians understood the Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit over time, over many years. The point is always "*fellowship*" – fellowship with God's gift of life and eternal life through our faith in Jesus, and fellowship with one another in the Church, Christ's body.

The beautiful, wonderful, dramatic story of Thomas, which we always read on the Second Sunday of Easter, reminds us of the reality of doubt. We have doubts; others have doubts; the world doubts the reality of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. How we deal with doubts, with our own and with others' doubts, defines our faith. People may hope for

eternal life, for heaven, but the world hardly reflects the reality of eternity, the reality of God's everlasting love, a love stronger than sin, evil and death.

What happens to Thomas in just one week, his transformation from doubt to faith, for many sometimes never happens. For most it happens over time, perhaps many years. So John ends with the words of the Risen Christ, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*"

John saw. Peter saw. Maybe a few hundred saw Jesus risen from the dead. They heard him. They touched him. They ate with him during those forty days. For the next fifty years people only saw those who celebrated fellowship – spiritually with the Risen Christ – through word, worship and sacrament; and physically with one another through the fellowship of the community, the Church, and the mission of this fellowship to the world.

We are here today, on what is unfortunately called "low Sunday" (because of our low attendance compared to last Sunday's Easter Day attendance) because of what John, Thomas and the others heard, saw, touched "*from the beginning..*"; from the first Easter Day, from Ascension, and from Pentecost, from all the generations through the history of the Church. Most of us are here because someone who loved or loves us, someone who cares about us, introduced us, brought us to the fellowship of the Church.

William Temple defined evangelism as "the presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of His Church." This is our mission, this is our work – to "*present Jesus Christ,*" to make disciples, to invite and help others to join with us in this great fellowship. So for us also, there are always two beginnings – creation and resurrection!

Acts 4:32-35  
Psalm 133  
1 John 1:1—2:2  
John 20:19-31