

Text: John 20: 19-31

Happy 8th day of Easter! The Easter season lasts a full 50 days because the resurrection is so central and important to us as people of faith who proclaim the Good News that Jesus was indeed risen from the grave. One of the beauties of Easter is that it is not only about a one time resurrection event – it is the fact that Jesus' resurrection is a foretaste and promise of our own resurrection and the resurrection provides us a lens through which to see all of life itself as well as death. Death is never the final word. And we see that our God is always in the business of Easter- of continually bringing new life- resurrection – out of death. We see Easter in nature all the time and spring reminds us of God's work in our world as flowers bloom and the green returns. And we see Easter right now as we find ourselves emerging from the pandemic – slowly but surely and cautiously but we see it evidenced here in San Diego where, thanks to the rise in vaccinations, our case rates of COVID have finally dropped so much that we moved on Wednesday to the Orange Tier and, of course, CA plans to re-open in June. This Easter season is bringing hope and new life in so many tangible ways even though there has been incredible loss and death over the past year. I'm not sure I've ever experienced an Easter season like this one before where the message of resurrection has been not only so clear but so important and relevant.

I was reflecting about the fact that a year ago this week – I was very sick and suffering from anxiety and encroaching despair during our total lock down, the school closures, three scared children, and the inability to gather at all with anyone for worship or with our extended family. It was a most isolating experience. Contrast that with this year – where we celebrated Maundy Thursday at Noon inside the church and had four Easter services starting at dawn here on our patio with about 600 people in attendance between them, along with the lighting of the new Easter fire, renewal of baptismal vows, our beautiful choir singing and the brass playing, as well as recorded services online. This year, I am not only NOT sick but am vaccinated. And I still feel like the vaccines are not only an answer to our prayers but are miracles as well. This Easter we got to go see my parents and family and the kids saw their cousins.

And did I mention that in person school begins on Monday? Not that I'm completely over the moon or anything.

I've also been touched with joy and gratitude by the outpouring we've had of people wanting to assist those of us in the Diocese with the incredible task we've been given to tend to the spiritual needs of the 1400 refugee and migrant girls at the Convention Center. In addition to the many volunteers and offers of donations, we quickly put together recorded worship services in Spanish for Good Friday and Easter to play for the girls. When I watched the videos and heard the message of God's love for these children and young people - I began to cry with gratitude. My heart is full. And it all feels like resurrection...and Easter has taken on new meaning this year.

Last year I felt more like doubting Thomas – I just couldn't see beyond the bad news to embrace the possibility of hope, let alone a miracle. And Thomas' story reminds us that we are all like Thomas at some point – we all need reassurances that our faith is not in vain when our situation looks dire and hopeless – we need to be assured again that God is with us and that miracles still happen. And Thomas is actually an example of faith because once he encountered Jesus he did not hesitate to proclaim the Good News. Jesus' call to Thomas is a call to all of us when he says, "Do not doubt but believe."

Do not doubt – but believe. And I can think of no better way to combat doubt and rediscover faith than to recount our own resurrection stories. I like to do this every year at Easter and I encourage you to think of and share stories of resurrection. Last year I shared the story of my son Graysen who had a traumatic birth and was near death until the NICU team resuscitated him. This year I'd like to share another one of my resurrection stories.

In my late twenties I went through a faith crisis following seminary. After graduation, my ordination process had gotten stalled and I had faced a number of obstacles and upsetting problems with the Church and so I had asked my Bishop to remove me entirely from the ordination track. In my mind, I was done with the church.

But I became very ill shortly after this and one night I was rushed to the ER. After a series of tests including a CT scan, the doctor told me they were seeing what looked like cancer in my abdomen and I was referred to a surgeon for follow up. More tests were run including an inconclusive biopsy, but at the end of it all, I was told by the surgeon that they were over 80% sure that I had a rare type of abdominal cancer that was essentially attacking several of my major organs. The mass was so large that it was taking up over 50 percent of my abdominal cavity, which was creating side effects of its own. I soon learned that the expected life span for this type of cancer was about 2 years. I went into grief, shock, sadness and anger in alternating waves - the weeks between the diagnosis and the surgery were terrifying. I didn't sleep – I would lay awake in the dark contemplating what it meant if I was at the end of my life. My faith had been barely hanging on until then, but, surprisingly, the first thought I had when confronted with my death was, "I can't die before getting ordained." So I began to pray again more deeply than ever and news of my condition traveled very quickly to friends and family across the nation. I was put on more prayers lists than I could keep track of and on the day of surgery I entered that hospital with a renewed sense of God's presence and with a strength and peace that was not my own. When I awoke from surgery I was met with smiles and tears. I learned that the surgery had gone so well that cheering had erupted in the operating room. My organs were still intact...and as more tests were done my surgeon gave me the good news that I did not have cancer and that, much to their surprise, the entire mass was benign. Friends, clergy, and family rejoiced in what felt like a miracle. After my recovery I called my Bishop and asked to return to the ordination process... and I never looked back. God had been with me in that dark hour and in that valley of the shadow of death – and had lead me back out into what felt like resurrection. I had my life again – but it was a new life – one filled with faith and renewed hope and clarity of God's power and strength. I felt like Thomas – that my doubts had been transformed to deep faith...and maybe that was the real miracle.

and bring about incredible transformation in your life. Recall your times of transformation – your resurrection stories – and remember that Easter is not just about Jesus' resurrection - it's about yours and mine and all of ours. Because our God is in the business of bringing life out of death....happy Easter and Alleluia!

If you have ever felt like Thomas – or if you feel like Thomas right now – don't despair...God's call is for you too and God is able to lift you from doubt to faith