

<i>Date Preached</i>	11-Apr-2021	<i>Date Initiated</i>	30-Mar-2021
<i>Where Preached</i>	SAK	<i>Appointed Readings</i>	Easter 2, Yr B

" And there was not a needy person among them ... "



Today is the Octave of Easter: an ancient liturgical construct in which the most important feasts of the year were celebrated not just for a day, but for an entire week. In our Prayer Book, Easter alone is allotted an octave. And on this eighth day, we begin to transition from *celebrating* Jesus' Resurrection to *living* it out ... to making it *ā*, if not *the*, generative fact of our lives: that from which all else comes alive and flourishes. And given that, this year, this Easter-turn comes just as we are beginning to re-gather as a community ... and think and plan, dream and pray about what our collective future may be ... I've been pondering what we might learn from the very earliest Christian communities as *they* began to turn from knowing the very first Easter to living it.

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Dear St Thomas was the one who got me started on this. Much hay, of course, is made about his 'doubting,' his demand for proof. In past sermons, in other places, I have defended him against these charges; and, God willing, you may hear me do so in Eastertides to come. But what I see in Thomas this day is not someone who *doubts* so much as someone who has *missed out*. Jesus has already come to the disciples' hideout and shown them the wounds in His hands and side: They now have 'insider information' about the Resurrection that the rest of the world doesn't. But Thomas was out that day: maybe tending to the sick and the hungry ... or maybe seeking some space, after days of anxious living in cramped quarters with ten other men. Whatever the reason, Thomas has missed the group's reunion with the risen Jesus and feels left out ... left behind ... unintentionally excluded. His demand for proof is the cry of a child not invited to the birthday party ... the hurt of the co-worker no one tells about drinks after work.

As we think and plan and decide what the next weeks and months of our corporate life as a parish should be ... how we should function as the Body of Christ in this corner of Connecticut ... we will need to be scrupulously conscious of those who may be feeling left out: parishioners and friends of St Andrew's who do not yet feel it is safe for them to be in large groups ... or who haven't yet been vaccinated ... or whose jobs don't permit them to leave a COVID 'protective bubble' ... or who may be struggling with anxiety caused by the endless series of unknowns and yet-to-be-determined this pandemic just keeps throwing at us.

At the most basic level, of course, we can and must make accommodations for our traveling companions along the Way of Christ: live-streaming all our liturgies; providing Zoom options for meetings and discussion groups; and offering to deliver or pick up things, in a contactless way, are all examples of this. But inclusion—*Christly* inclusion—goes well beyond mere accommodation; beyond just work-arounds or catch ↓ ups those who may find themselves on the periphery of our community. Jesus doesn't turn to Thomas and report what he missed—"oh, Tom, right ... let me bring you up-to-speed; when I was here last time" No, Jesus responds to Thomas' hurt and *ministers* to him. Jesus anticipates what the one who missed out must be feeling ... and needing; and then proactively addresses that, so he feels *generously welcomed*.

And in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we find many further examples of such community generosity animating that very earliest Church. As more and more followers of Jesus, convinced by the Resurrection and inspired by the Holy Spirit, came together, we hear of them doing three things:

- First, they make sacrifices: give over to the community what they had owned individually.

As we explore what it means to be a parish in both the peri-COVID era (we hope) ... *and* in the middle of the twenty-first century ... there may be one or two things we will need to lay aside: traditions that now seem a little empty... programs there is no longer a 'market' for ... maybe images of our collective self that have grown a bit outdated.

- Second, in Acts, these sacrifices allow the Christian community to attend to the *common* or more-universal good. These earliest Christians consistently ask, "What do our people need? What can't our people do on their own?"

Now, "*our* people," in some ways, includes everyone living in Kent, in Connecticut, in the United States and beyond. But, for today, let's confine our thoughts just to those who are part of the St Andrew's family. We need to look at families with school-age children and ask how we can effectively and conveniently minister to them. We need to look at parishioners who may have mobility or transportation needs ... or who may feel isolated ... and ask how we can serve them. We need be attentive to members of our family whose previous ways of serving are now too taxing, and come up with more creative, less labor-intensive ways they can participate.

- Third, in all things, the Jerusalem community shared the Good News, with preaching and teaching taking place every day. As important as the food they provided one another at the supper table was the food they shared via their ears and in their hearts: the Word.

It is difficult to nurture an active, spirit-sustaining, life-feeding faith via one hour a week—I know: I tried it for decades. We will, I think, want to ponder ways we may dwell in the word of God ... in prayer and meditation, in study and silence ... both individually and in groups. We will also want to dream of ways we can share the Good News with those who may not feel comfortable coming through our doors or sitting in our pews just yet ... or, perhaps, ever. May it come to be said of us here at Bridge and Main that we live as fully in the generative energy of Easter as our spiritual ancestors did in ancient Jerusalem.

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A generosity of community radiates in many directions all at once: toward other members of the community, in inclusion and service; toward our own selves, in giving ourselves permission to put things down and think in new ways; and, above all, toward God, in a prayerful dialogue that aligns our sights to the full abundance we know God has laid up for us. It takes time and conscious effort to practice generosity of community, but imagine the day when we may look around and say—speaking not just materially, but also spiritually and emotionally—"There is not a needy person among us."



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