

Down to the River to Pray

Words are in the print copy.

*Old Orchard Church
Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 21, 2013—10:15 to 11:50 a.m.*

*Then he said to Thomas,
"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and
put out your hand, and place it in my side.
Do not disbelieve, but believe."*



Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

*Jesus said to him,
"Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have believed."*

-John 20:27-29 (ESV)

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

Celebrating the Immortal Jesus as the Resurrection Community of Prayer & Faith

Having been raised with Christ,
Children of the resurrection
See the glory of his Kingdom
And set their hearts on things above
Where Christ is seated at God's right hand:

In all their play, in all their work;
In all that's hard, in all that's full of pleasure,
They pray through the Son to their Father:
"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"

Blessed be our Lord Christ,
Who in his death justified us before God,
And in his immortal life intercedes for us Above.

It's our high privilege to carry everything to him in prayer—
To him whom the angels adore, the demons fear,
And the planets obey.

Bless the Lord this Resurrection Day, with all his saints.
Alleluia!



Today's Scripture

Gospel Reading: John 20:24-31

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 69:1-18

Today's Sermon

"The Prayer of Faith"

James 5:13-18

Mark Robertson, associate pastor, preaching

History or Fantasy?

That Jesus succeeded in changing a snuffling band of unreliable followers into fearless evangelists, that eleven men who had deserted him at death now went to martyrs' graves avowing their faith in a resurrected Christ, that these few witnesses managed to set loose a force that would overcome violent opposition first in Jerusalem and then in Rome—this remarkable sequence of transformation offers the most convincing evidence for the Resurrection. What else explains the whiplash change in men known for their cowardice and instability?

Others—at least fifteen Jews within a hundred years of Jesus—had made Messiah claims, only to flare and then fade like a dying star. Fanatic loyalty to Jesus, though, did not end with his death. Something had happened, something beyond all precedent. Surely the disciples would not lay down their lives for the sake of a cobbled-together conspiracy theory. Surely it would have been easier, and more natural, to honor a dead Jesus as one of the martyr-prophets whose tombs were so venerated by the Jews.

One need only read the Gospels' descriptions of disciples huddling behind locked doors and then proceed to the descriptions in Acts of the same men proclaiming Christ openly in the streets and in jail cells to perceive the seismic significance of what took place on Easter Sunday. The Resurrection is the epicenter of belief. It is, says C.H. Dodd, "not a belief that grew up within the church; it is the belief around which the church itself grew up, and the 'given' upon which its faith was based." Novelist John Updike states the same truth more poetically:

*Make no mistake if he rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.*

"**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,**" Jesus said to doubting Thomas after silencing his doubts with tangible proof of the Easter miracle. Except for the five hundred or so people to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared, every Christian who has ever lived falls into the category of "blessed." I ask myself, *Why do I believe?*—I, who resemble Thomas more than any other disciple in my skepticism and slowness to accept what cannot be proved beyond doubt.

I have weighed the arguments in favor of the resurrection, and they are indeed impressive. The English journalist Frank Morison dealt with most of these arguments in the classic *Who Moved the Stone?* Although Morison had set out to discount the resurrection as a myth, the evidence convinced him otherwise. Yet I also know that many intelligent people have looked at the same evidence and found it impossible to believe. Although much about the Resurrection invites belief, nothing compels it. Faith requires the possibility of rejection, or it is not faith.

—Philip Yancey in *The Jesus I Never Knew* (1995)