

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

12th April 2026 – Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

LIVING IN THE RESURRECTION!

You may well have heard of the Easter tradition of the ‘Stations of the Cross’ before. If you haven’t, it’s a display that many churches do at Easter time to tell the Easter story. It has different pictures or places to show each part of the story. It’s like the Easter equivalent to a nativity play. It can be done around the walls of a church, or over a much larger area, and in our congregation a few years ago we even had one set up with QR codes so it could be done digitally. Every year thousands of people climb a mountain in the Italian Alps to go past a large outdoor ‘Stations of the Cross’. At the end of this particular display, people come and stand before an outdoor crucifix, which is then the end of the journey they have just taken. One tourist, though, once noticed a very overgrown and faded track that went beyond the cross. Fighting his way through the thick growth, he discovered that the original trail led up to and beyond the cross to an empty shrine which symbolised the empty tomb of Jesus. It had been unused and neglected for years and was now so overgrown that it was barely visible and completely forgotten. Visitors had gone as far as the cross, but always stopped there.

Are we like that in our Christian lives? Do we go right up to the cross of Jesus, but then stop there? If we do, it’s nothing new. This is what the disciples were having trouble doing in today’s Gospel reading. They knew Jesus very well. They had had their ups and downs, but they had come to trust Him and to believe that He was the One who would make a difference not just to their own lives, but to their nation, and to the world. But then He died. They saw that too. And now, they were afraid and locked up together in a house. They were worried that the Jewish leaders might come and treat them the same way Jesus had been treated. On top of that, they didn’t know what was happening. John and Peter had seen the empty tomb, they believed Jesus had risen from the dead. Mary Magdalene was adamant she

had actually spoken to Him. What was stopping them from not just believing what had happened, but also in living as though they believed it?

Let's have a look at a clip from the movie, 'The Bucket List' (2007). For those who don't know it, this movie is about two men, played by Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, who meet in hospital when they are both told that they only have a short time to live. Although their life circumstances and experiences are very different, they quickly become good friends and team up to travel the world to accomplish their 'Bucket List' – the things they want to do and experience before they die. Have a look at this clip in which they talk about faith and God. (*This clip can be found on YouTube by searching 'Bucket List faith scene'*).

It's a good clip from a great movie, and it really shows the difference in the two men in their approach to life and to faith. In a lot of ways, the difference in these two characters, and where they find themselves in their situation in life, is summed up by Morgan Freeman's response to Jack Nicholson's lack of faith; 'Maybe your head gets in the way'.

Faith and doubt. They sort of go together, don't they? Like; good and evil, hot and cold, black and white. Can you really know one without knowing the other? The theme of faith and doubt is big in the Bible; people struggling to believe and trust in God despite what is going on inside themselves or what they see around them. Sound familiar?

And, quite naturally, that's where the disciples find themselves on the first Easter Sunday. They had been with Jesus for three years, had seen His power and heard His teaching, but they had also been there and seen Him die on the cross. They knew He had died, no doubt about it. Sure, He'd been saying all sorts of stuff about coming alive again, but they had no idea what that meant.

And then, Jesus comes to them. It's very important here that Jesus does not tell them off for their doubts or lack of faith, or have a go at them because they are hiding away scared. What does He do? We're told; 'He greeted them and showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord,

they became very happy.’ (19b-20) No rebukes, no telling off. Coming to the disciples where they are at. Ministering to them where they are at.

There is one poor fellow who cops a lot in this story, Thomas. For the last two thousand years he has often been called ‘Doubting Thomas’. Perhaps a much better name would be ‘Honest Thomas’. The doubts that Thomas had were no different from the others before they first saw Jesus. Indeed, I’m sure they are no different from the doubts many, if not all, of us go through regularly. And it’s interesting that, rather than rebuking Thomas for his doubts, Jesus did everything He could to help Thomas believe. And after Thomas had seen the risen Jesus, he makes one of the strongest confessions in the whole Bible; ‘You are my Lord and my God’. There is so much in that. Thomas is saying that Jesus is the risen Lord. He is using the same name for Jesus that God’s people used for God in the Old Testament. He is saying that Jesus is nothing less than God Himself, and also that Jesus is Lord, or master, over his life. What a strong confession!

As witnesses of the resurrection, we can make this our confession too, it says that we believe Jesus is all He says He is. It says that for us the resurrection isn’t just a past historical event, but it is something we live in each day. Some years ago, I had the Jehovah’s Witnesses knock on my door one Easter Monday. I had a bit of time, so thought I would have a chat with them. You may know that a teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is that Jesus is not God, but just a man. To back this up some of their Bible texts have been changed; for example their John 1:1 reads ‘The Word was *a* god’. At one point I got a little bit stuck, and ran inside to check up in a little book I have called, ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse’. It suggested using Thomas’ confession in this story as an argument that Jesus is God. When they checked that in their Bibles, it hadn’t been changed. Jesus is God, no argument, it’s there plainly; Thomas says ‘You are my Lord and my God’ (28b), and Jesus accepts that confession. I have been thankful to Thomas and his confession ever since, and prayed that something that day may have helped those two people come to know the risen Jesus as Lord and God.

It is a strong confession, it's a life changing confession. It's a confession in the truth of the resurrection. And when we can make this confession with Thomas, we also have the peace the disciples had when Jesus came to them. Remember how this peace calmed their fears. This is the peace which comes to us in the midst of all we have happening in our lives. The peace Jesus speaks to the things we are worried about, the things we are concerned about, the things we are afraid of. The peace which turned the lives of the disciples around from being worried and afraid, to going out confidently and telling everyone about the truth of the resurrection, and the difference it makes to their lives. That's the peace, the life-giving and life-changing peace, which Jesus gives to us as His followers today.

Last week we remembered and celebrated again the great events of Easter. But when we move beyond the cross and live in the resurrection, when we don't allow our heads to get in the way, we remember that these are not just historical events back then, but events which are just as life changing for us all today. Thanks to those who first saw the risen Jesus, with Thomas we can also confess, 'You are my Lord and my God!' Live now in the life, the peace, and the hope of the resurrection. Because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

For further discussion/reflection

- Do you tend to believe everything you are told, or are you more of a cynic? What factors usually help you to believe that something is true?
- Try to imagine how the disciples would have felt when they first heard that Jesus is alive. If you were Thomas, on the basis of what you were told do you think you would have believed this news or not?
- Are there any happenings in your life, or in the world, which sometimes cause you to doubt? Any thoughts you have which cause your 'head to get in the way'? Pray about your doubts (it's not unusual to have them) bringing them to God and asking for His strength and guidance with them.
- Consider what the good news of Jesus' resurrection means to you in your life. How can you live this news out each day? How can you share it?

Prayer: thank God that Jesus is alive, and that this changes our lives and our world. Pray for God's help, strength and guidance with doubts we now face in our faith.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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