

**St Mark's, Niagara-on-the-Lake**  
**The Second Sunday of Easter, year 'C'**  
**24 April 2022**  
**The Rev'd Leighton Lee**

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For some reason, Talleyrand, the brilliant, scheming, self-serving statesman who served Louis XVI and Napoleon—as well as Louis XVIII and Louis-Philippe—has been on my mind lately. He was the ultimate operator and cynic and of all his talents perhaps the greatest was survival. It's said that when he learned of Napoleon's death on Elba, Talleyrand said, "This is not an event; it's a piece of news."

Today, on this Second Sunday of Easter—a day appropriately nicknamed "Low Sunday"—perhaps you and I are feeling low and finding ourselves struggling with whether the resurrection isn't an event but merely a piece of news. Like Thomas we may even be struggling with doubt and can't help but wonder if this is yet another instance of fake news. And who could blame us if we are? After all the resurrection accounts don't meet modern standards of veracity and verifiability, what with all their discrepancies.

But I shouldn't be so cynical. Maybe we do believe the resurrection accounts—or believe them despite our doubts. However, I suspect we believe in the way we believe the reports of events like wars, famines, and disasters which take place in far-flung places: simply news to be received but not acted on, not things which have much impact on our quotidian existence. And I suppose that's understandable, since all of this happened so long ago—and so far away. With every passing year it becomes more-and-more an abstraction.

Yet resurrection isn't an abstraction, it's a reality, just as faith isn't a piece of news which leads to belief. Remember poor Thomas said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." I've always wondered if that event—putting fingers in wounds—was really all it took. Sure, he's recorded as saying, "My Lord and my God!" But Jesus is also recorded as saying, "Have you believed because you have seen me?"

I watched a few online Easter Day services last week and I was amazed at how many sermons were of the "I'm going to convince you this really happened" variety. To treat the resurrection like a piece of news which can be forensically examined, tested, and proved is problematic—to say the least. I'll even go so far as to say it's essentially a fool's errand. And I say this because the resurrection's an event which leads to life and because the believing is bound up with the living.

The trouble is, you and I are always yearning for what Talleyrand called the *douceur de vivre*—the sweetness of life. But he spoke of the sweetness of life in a nostalgic way: "He who has not lived in the eighteenth century before the Revolution does not know

the sweetness of life and cannot imagine that there can be happiness in life.” These are the sentiments of someone who yearned for the good old days, the days before everything was turned on its head and all of the old familiar routines were swept away. But these are also the sentiments of someone who, despite being a cynical operator, was also a survivor, someone who knew how to adapt and change.

You and I know how quickly life’s sweetness can turn sour—be it with a doctor’s phone call or a lover’s break-up text or the rise in COVID-19 case numbers. We spend much of our lives paralyzed by fear, locked in by grief, and anxious for the future. In moments of pain and angst and doubt, our tendency is to retreat to the sweetness of halcyon days of the past. And this is what Talleyrand was talking about.

So to receive the resurrection as merely a piece of news is, in many ways, to try to move forward by looking in the rear-view mirror. It’s to be stuck in the past. It’s to be like the disciples in that Upper Room. But to experience it as an event is to be thrust into an uncertain and unsettling future. On Easter Day the whole universe was turned on its head and we must learn to adapt to—and thrive in—this new reality.

You see, resurrection isn’t simply something we’ve been told about but don’t experience. It’s something we undergo today and every day, and if it all seems so unbelievable maybe it’s because we show very little evidence of its power working in us. Easter faith lets go of the past—no matter how sweet—and says a radical “yes” both to the present moment and the future promise. It refuses to succumb to doubt and despair and learns to laugh even in the face of death. It isn’t about going to heaven after we die but about making this present hell a little more heavenly.

More and more I’ve come to think it’s this last one which is the most important. Alas, we—and by we, I mean the Church—we have wasted so much time trying to convince folks that the news of the resurrection is reliable when what we should have been doing all along is showing them the power of this event in the here-and-now. You’ll notice that the disciples didn’t retreat into nostalgia, looking back to the good old days with the Master as they waited for their turn to join him in heaven. No: they set their faces and energy to the future and, in the power of the resurrection, began to remake the world into something resembling a little of the kingdom Jesus died to bring.

The Acts of the Apostles tells the remarkable story of how they went out into the world in the power of the spirit to speak about—and live out—resurrection faith. I think that power was made manifest in how they lived their lives in a new and wholly radical way because they were energized by the awesome power the resurrection event awoke within them. And in that power they stopped looking back with regretful wistfulness at what they’d lost and dared to believe that what was coming to birth was for more precious.

Jesus said, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” Of course not. But maybe people *will* come to believe because they have seen in you and me a radical response to this cosmic event. A response so radical that even in a pandemic-haunted world we

can help the people we encounter stop yearning for a world which is gone and instead believe that something even sweeter is about to burst forth—but only if we're of one heart and mind, resolved to never give folks a reason to believe that this event isn't *still* good news.