

Kirk of St James Sermon
Sunday, April 12th, 2026
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

The week after Easter is often referred to as “low Sunday” the high point of Easter is now over, and we are back into routine, the leftovers are hopefully gone, and life continues. One person likened this Sunday as being similar to arriving late at a party—most people have left, clean up is just finishing, and all you keep hearing about is what a great time it was, but now it is over, and things feel flat.

It is not surprising then that the gospel reading for this week focus’s on doubting Thomas and the events immediately after the crucifixion. What is surprising is that the lectionary pairs it with a selection from Acts better suited to Pentecost. As I was looking through my notes I noticed I don’t often use this passage from Acts so we are going to step away from Thomas this year and turn instead to Peter, who is quite openly preaching the Good News to those who have gathered. This is a big change from the early days of the crucifixion when the disciples were huddled and locked together as they tried to understand what was happening. Peter has seen the risen lord and now he is going to share the news with everyone.

While we associate Pentecost with the inbreaking of the spirit of God, Pentecost was originally a pilgrimage festival for Jewish people, and some sources say they would gather from as far away as 1000 miles. Also known as The Festival of Weeks, it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover. When Peter stands up to speak that day it is to a mix of people. For some they had not been eye witnesses to Jesus’ life and death—in fact they may never have heard of this Jesus of Nazareth at all. For others they would have been in the city for the triumphal entry, then the crucifixion, death and resurrection. They might currently be

wrestling with what they believe and what they experienced. Not to mention the crowds that had been following Jesus before his death and witnessing the miracles he was performing and the teachings he was sharing.

When Peter stands up to speak he needs to share a message that makes sense and explains and addresses some of the questions people have been left with. I read a paraphrase this week that I found really helpful, it said, ““All of you listen up!” Peter says. “This Jesus, whom you crucified, is more than just a name. He is more than a prophet and a good man. He is the Messiah, the Holy One proclaimed by David and our other prophets. This is the saviour for whom we have been waiting for generations. Every single one of you is a witness to this truth. Whether you saw Jesus with your eyes or are now hearing the good news for the very first time, you are a witness to what I am telling you today. Let Jesus be more than name to you, Peter says. Let Christ be your Savior. Hear with your heart as well as your ears. Then you can proclaim Jesus as Lord and know the joy of Christ’s amazing saving grace.”

There was something about Peter’s message that day that pierced peoples hearts. It transcended languages, cultures, religion and social stature. I cannot imagine what that moment must have been like. We are only ever able to read the Bible already knowing the outcomes but for people that day they were hearing something totally new. We take it for granted, we read the Easter story every year, we celebrate the birth of Jesus each Christmas and proclaim the Good News. That day as people listened they were hearing something for the first time, and Peter’s words changed their lives.

“Three thousand people were baptized that day...the number of new believers was more than enough to slow the flow of the Jordan River and make everyone around stop and take notice. Peter’s impromptu sermon is the first of

nearly thirty such speeches found in the book of Acts. It kicks off the church like a bottle of fine champagne cracking the stern of a ship on its inaugural launch.” Then each of those people returned to homes all around the region and shared what had happened. The story they had been hearing for generations, the Messiah they had been waiting for—he has arrived, and even when the world tried to kill him, he rose again from the dead. This message is like a crack of lightning.

While some people have philosophical minds, I am not one of them. However, I can remember in my first university philosophy class reading Plato’s Allegory *The Cave*. In it people are kept chained to a wall where they see shadows projected onto the outer wall. Those shadows are reality for them, but they are not accurate compared to the real world. It echoes Paul when he says, “¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^[a] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” In this moment, as Peter is talking people are catching a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

There is a Quaker question that is sometimes used as an icebreaker in church groups. It asks, “When did God become more than a name to you?” What a fantastic question. When did the things we read in the bible and learn about in church become something more to us? A faith that is not something dead or static, but rather something that is growing, changing and real to us? I am not sure I could say with absolute certainty, but I have an idea. Growing up church was something we did on Sunday morning. It was Sunday school and youth group, and early morning services. It was something we did, and we never pushed back on it much. In university I went through a period of deconstruction, while I sorted out what I believed, and asked questions, and had to claim things for myself. But the moment, was simply a night sitting out under the sky, when the rest of the world was mostly asleep, but the night sky wasn’t. For whatever reason in that moment, struck by the

beauty and creativity of God something settled. It does not mean it has been smooth sailing, that I have never raged at God, that I have never asked questions and complained, but for me that is the moment I come back to. When did God become real to you?

I really enjoyed a pastoral perspective I read on this passage while preparing for this morning by Kathleen Long Bostrom, who is a presbyterian minister in the States, it helped frame this morning. One of the things she talked about was how one of the gifts of children is their ability to see the world through fresh eyes. For example, dandelions are not just weeds, they are wishes we can send on the wind when we blow their fluffy seeds into the air. Cracks in the sidewalk are to be jumped over, and acorns and little stones are treasures to be stored away in pockets. They remind us of wonder, and beauty, and seeing the amazing parts of this world in new ways. As we grow up, we also tend to grow out of this sense of wonder. The same can likely be said of our faith. We know these stories, we read them over and over, and the sense of wonder and newness is lost. Peter reminds us to wake up. “Every time we hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ, it is Pentecost, all over again. We are set on fire by the thrill of it, just as the disciples were lit up by the flame of the Holy Spirit on that very first Pentecost celebration. The question to ask, therefore, if not simply, “When did God become more than just a name to you? But rather, “How is God more than just a name to you now, in this moment, at this time in your life?” It is a timeless question that bears asking time and time again.”