

The Rev. John Sampson, Pastor
Glen Ridge Congregational Church
Sunday, April 19, 2026
John 20:19 – 31

Resurrection Not Resuscitation



Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Alleluia!

Christ is Risen!

Happy Easter!

This morning, we continue our journey through Eastertide, the season of resurrection. And one of the most memorable stories of Eastertide, I think, is the story we just heard. It is the story of Thomas, who will not believe in Christ's resurrection until he is able to meet the risen Jesus and inspect his wounds. In many churches, today would be a day to hear a reflection about doubt and faith. And so will we. But instead of starting with Thomas, and his doubts, I want to begin by looking deeply at the resurrected body that stands before him, and stands before us.

When we think about resurrection, we might imagine an event that returns to us a body as it was before it died. In the case of Jesus, we might assume that in his resurrection we have restored to us the body of the Christ before it was falsely accused and sentenced to death. But the body that returns is not the body that was arrested in Gethsemane. It is something new, something unexpected. It has been changed by death, and yet it lives.

We already got a taste of this holy reimagining that we call “resurrection” last week, when we heard the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. There, two of Jesus’s closest friends do not recognize him when they meet him on their travels. Christ’s body has been transformed and become a stranger.

In today’s story, the risen body of Jesus acts almost like a ghost, appearing out of nowhere, able to penetrate locked doors. This is something Jesus never did before his death. But what is most striking about this resurrection body is that it continues to bear the wounds of its crucifixion. Jesus returns and he doesn’t show the disciples perfectly healed skin, or even scars. He shows them the holes made in his hands and feet and side. He shows them traumas that haven’t healed and still gape wide.

What he shows the disciples, and what he shows us, is that resurrection doesn’t play into an either/or dynamic. It is a holy process of transformation that embraces a paradoxical both/and. Christ’s body continues to suffer the deep mortal wounds of crucifixion AND his body lives. His body is material in that it can be touched, AND it is like a ghost that can pass through locked doors.

In our assumptions about resurrection, we might think that the new life Easter promises erases history and simply resets our clocks to a pre-traumatic past. But Jesus’s body tells us that there is no going back: not for him, not for his disciples, and not for us. Instead, there is a different truth that proclaims itself in Easter, in a mortally wounded body that offers itself to be touched and shared.

As I have gotten to know this congregation more deeply, I can see that many of us carry not just physical wounds, but also deep psychological and spiritual wounds. Wounds that have been so traumatic that they have caused the people who we once were to be entombed; to experience a kind of death. And we may

be mourning what has been lost, and holding on to the hope that who we were can be regained. We are hoping that our earlier selves might just be resuscitated.

But what the risen Christ, standing before us showing us his wounds, offers us is not the possibility of returning to who we were, but the opportunity to move into a paradoxical future where our trauma isn't forgotten, but no longer controls us. In Easter, we are shown an icon of a life that integrates our most profound crises and allows them to become part of a new reimagined whole.

It is with this image of the resurrected body of Christ in mind, in all of its beautiful and sobering complexity, that we can invite Thomas, with his doubts, to reenter the frame of this reflection.

Why did Thomas doubt?

Why did he doubt that Jesus had been returned to life when all of his friends told him they had seen him?

Why did he doubt when Jesus himself had shared with all of his disciples many times that he would die and be raised?

Perhaps Thomas doubted because he couldn't imagine the possibility of God using paradox to drive the unfolding of God's salvation history. Perhaps he doubted because he could only believe in the either/or of death or life. Perhaps he could never have imagined that maybe, just maybe, trauma can be overcome not through its denial, but by integrating it into a new image of a transformed self.

Whatever it was that caused Thomas to doubt, something that went against all he believed entered that locked room, that locked heart of his, and changed Thomas forever. Because what entered that locked space didn't look like death. It looked like life that was victorious over death.

Easter is not a story about the past. It is a truth about us, even here, and even today. It is about the places in our lives that have been traumatized, and entombed. It is about how we can feel dead inside of ourselves. It is a critique about how our minds and hearts can be locked by the grief of what has been lost, and an ongoing mourning for what can't be recaptured.

It is into these places that the promise of Easter comes like a man bearing the marks of his own death, moving past our inability to believe in the paradox of blessed life lived even while carrying the wounds of the past. It tells us that we can never be resuscitated, that we can never go back. But it offers us a gift so much more precious and blessed. It offers us resurrection: a new life where we move differently through the world than we did before; a new life where our trauma informs how we live, but no longer controls us; a new life so blessed that those who know us best might not immediately recognize our faces because they have been transfigured by integrating the most difficult experiences into our own understanding of who we are.

This is Easter, our celebration of the sovereignty of God's gift of resurrection, given to Jesus, and because it is given to him, it is given to all of us. So let us proclaim again, together:

Alleluia*

Christ.is.Risen*

Happy.Easter*..

Amen.