

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter. The scripture text is taken from John 20: 19-31

Early on the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, two airman, who had just taken their post at a radar lookout station, several miles north of Pearl Harbor, and saw on the radar screen, a large mass moving in from the sea, towards the Hawaiian Islands.

The first airman was immediately startled by what he saw on the screen, and prepared to follow procedures and phone in a warning to his superiors.

He believed a large force of what could be enemy planes, was now headed their way. He believed the evidence on the radar screen was unmistakable, and something bad was about to happen.

While the second airman remained skeptical, believing that what he saw, was just an optical illusion of some kind, besides there was a flight of B-17's coming in from California.

The first airman did as instructed, and phoned in the alarm. The officer who took the call at Pearl Harbor dismissed the report and chose not to believe what he had just heard, and abruptly, hung up the phone.

That same morning, the USS Ward, a destroyer, patrolling the waters outside the harbor, the ship's look out, spotted what he believed to be an enemy submarine.

The Captain of the USS Ward, had been alerted for some time, about the possibility, of enemy vessels breaching harbor security, and he too, followed established procedures, and wired in a warning, that the enemy had been sighted.

Again, the message was disbelieved, this time by the base commander, suggesting that the submarine sighted, needed "more confirmation" before any defensive action would be taken.

At this point, we can say, the rest is history.

On that fateful morning, many lives were lost in that surprise attack, all because of the reaction of several people, who either refused to believe what they saw, just could not believe what they heard, or were not about to be moved until more evidence, was forthcoming.

The 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel describes the very same reaction to the resurrection evidence.

There was one who believed, without seeing. There was one who believed upon hearing. There were those who believed upon seeing. And there was one who would not believe, unless he was able to touch and see.

The writer of John's Gospel says: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simone Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." (chapter 20, verses 1 to 2).

Peter ran to the sight and is stunned by what he sees, an empty tomb with strips of linen and a burial cloth lying where Jesus had been placed.

The empty tomb and linen cloths were enough for John to declare his belief in the risen Christ. No other evidence was required.

There are people who are able to take a stand and believe, without requiring more than what is presented, they go on, with what they have, whether a little or a lot.

John, therefore, is one who believes without having to see, the risen Christ. Second, there are those, who believe upon hearing.

Mary Magdalene stands outside the tomb, weeping, and as she weeps, she sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been.

In verse 13, she laments, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

And then, she turns around, and there a man is standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.

When Jesus simply says: "Mary", she knows His voice, and replies, "Rabboni"!

There are those who believed upon hearing. Mary Magdalene had spent so much time with Jesus, that she knew His voice.

The story is told of Malcolm Muggeridge, who was a staunch Marxist, before he became a Christian. During the Cold War, he traveled to Russia, to write a story about the Communist Party, and the decline of religion in that atheistic regime.

After conducting a series of interviews with officials in the Kremlin, he attended a Russian Orthodox Easter Service.

To his surprise, the church was packed. At the close of the service, the priest announced: "Christ is risen, and the people shouted back, "He is risen indeed."

He heard their unified voice, filled with praise. He looked into their faces, and knew in his heart, that they were right, and that Stalin was wrong.

He said, it was the reality of their joy, that tipped the scales of his soul, toward Christ. It was through their voice of praise, that he heard the voice of Christ.

Then there were those, who believed upon seeing. On the evening of the first day, the writer of John's Gospel tells us verse 19: "When it was evening on that day, the first day of week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them, and said; "Peace be with you."

Then Jesus shows His disciples His hands and His side. And of course the disciples' reaction was one of utter joy when they saw the Lord, alive and among them.

There are those, who believe, but only when confirmed with their own eyes. Think of where you were and what you were doing on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

If you think back to the events of that day, even though we were watching it on television, it was still difficult to believe. Think about your reaction. I know when I watched it, my reaction was, "This cannot be real, this cannot be happening, Oh my God, we are going to war with somebody, real soon!"

Each time, the images were flashed on television, people would continue to say: "I just don't believe it" yet, it was very real and, it was happening in real time, right there.

Then, there was Thomas. Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared that night. And remember, Thomas' reaction was one of total disbelief. He would not believe unless he could touch Jesus' hands and side, where the nails were driven in, and see the wound in his side, where the spear was thrust into Jesus' body.

And when Thomas sees Jesus one week later in the upper room. There he said: "My Lord and my God." (verse 28)

Each person in the resurrection story has a reaction. No one left the tomb or an encounter with Christ without expressing some emotion, a change in life, even.

As we have begun the Easter Season, the miracle of Easter, the miracle of the resurrection, should change us. News of the resurrected Christ should cause some type of reaction in every person.

Either there is doubt, or outright disbelief, or acceptance and changed lives. There must be some reaction. It's kind of like, news reporters on the scene of some catastrophic event, finding a witness to the event, and saying to that witness: "What is your reaction to what has just happened?"

So what is your reaction, now that we have begun the Easter Season? I would hope that your reaction would be one of great joy, hope and optimism. The news of new life, in Christ, still rings true. Heaven is still real, death has been defeated, and Christ is alive, He lives forevermore, and for us as believers, as we go about and live our day to day lives, we can look forward to the future with hope, even while we await His glorious return.

Easter Sunday, is almost like Christmas Eve. Before we get to Christmas, we must go through the season of Advent. And the season of Lent precedes Easter.

There is so much work that goes into planning the worship services of Lent and Holy Week, there is the preparation for the Sunrise service, the Easter Egg Hunt, and of course the 10 AM service with everything that has to come together.

All this builds up and comes together on Easter Sunday morning. Remember last Sunday, we had a great turn out of people for the sunrise service as well as the 10AM service. The music was wonderful and so uplifting. This should fill us with encouragement.

So do all of these emotions need to fade away because Easter Sunday is over? The answer of course is "No!"

The reality of Jesus coming back to life, changed the lives of His disciples, for the rest of their lives. In fact, those timid disciples, who fled in fear, now would live their lives, proclaiming Christ with boldness everywhere they went.

It wasn't just a day or two of saying; "this is amazing, and then back to the routine of life, back to the "ho-hum" of day to day living. No, the resurrection changed lives then, it changes lives now, and will continue to change lives in the future.

Through God in Christ, you and I have been forgiven of our sins, and have the hope and the promise unto eternal life.

Jesus said, because I live, you also will live.

Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you.

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life, everyone who believes in me will live, even though die, and whoever lives by believing in me, will never die.

Christ is alive, He lives forevermore, as we live by faith in Him, let this season of Easter, make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those we encounter each and everyday. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord has conquered death, sin and the power of the devil. As we move into this Easter Season, let us remember that we are an Easter people, who live in the victory won for us by Jesus Christ our Lord through the miracle of the resurrection. He is worthy of our worship and our praise. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.