

**Easter 2**  
**15/04/2007**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Acts 5: 27-32**  
**Revelation 1: 4-8**  
**John 20: 19-31**

**Sermon by Sandra Oliver-Jobling**

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Here, in this sacred place, with the image of the burning bush above us, the colour of life greets us every Sunday morning and we enter holy space. Here, we ... with deliberation, come to glorify the one who is risen and proclaim "My Lord and my God."

**Let us pray:**

Lord let your Word be known and live in us.

**Amen**

Ever since I watched the story of Johnny Cash's life in the movie, "Walk the Line" I've had a growing interest in the life of this country and western singer. Cash has stated that in every album he sold he placed at least one song of proclamation. This he did in a climate that was openly hostile to Christian worship.

Cash did not have an easy life. At the age of twelve, he witnessed his brother's death. Jack was fourteen. Cash says "Jack was my big brother and my hero: my best friend, my big buddy, my mentor and my protector."

I believe Thomas, one of the twelve, might well have said something similar about the earthly Jesus if asked. Thomas was the disciple who suggested the twelve follow Jesus to Judea to join Jesus in his death. There is no doubt about the love of Thomas for Jesus.

However, when the disciples saw the risen Christ they said to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas was sceptical. And his scepticism is understandable. Anyone who has experienced grief would know that Thomas' world was fragile – held together by memories of the now dead Jesus. In this darkness he was confronted by the disciple's news of the risen Christ. His reply should not shock us.

His reply comes out of the depth of his pain. He 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."

Thomas wants to see, feel and enter Christ. It is Thomas' call for a personal experience of the living Christ. It is to be how Thomas knew Christ in the past, it is to be an earthly experience. However, the gospel reveals that it is Jesus Christ who confronts and challenges. Jesus tells Thomas to:

“Put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt but believe.”

There is a condition to Thomas's new knowledge of Jesus. Thomas is to believe. Thomas cannot witness and be a non-believer. He can't sit on the sidelines. To believe is to act if you are true to yourself, but we live in a climate of denial. While we are a freedom-loving nation our truth is more often than not controlled by the media and its sponsorship. When we are confronted by the sacred, when God reveals himself, people do not want to participate in believing. Believing is costly and denial is cheap.

This denial, this blindness and inability to participate in belief is supported by a stark portrayal of reliance on our own human capability. Early in the movie “Walk the Line” we are confronted with Jack's accident – a timber-saw, as big as the boy, cuts through his stomach and there is much blood and no hope.

We have a very personal viewing of Jack's dying – the bedroom scene – Jack's death happens quickly – with just enough time for us to shed our own tears.

In real life Jack took eight days to die. He lived his short life believing in God, and he lived his final moments with a strong conviction of God, guiding him and caring for him.

Jack, in his room, lies dying. Momma stands at the head of the bed. The family is gathered around him.

Jack says, “I'm glad you're all here.”

His eyes close and he says, “It's a beautiful river.

It's going two ways ... No, I'm not going that way

... Yes, that's the way I'm going.

Mumma can't you see it?”

“No, son, I can't see it,” she says.

“Well can't you hear the angels?”

“No, son, I can't hear the angels.”

Tears spill from his eyes. "I wish you could", he says.

"They're so beautiful. It's so wonderful, and what a beautiful place I'm going."

When someone we love dies the barrier between worldly events and other-world events grow thin. There seems to be a breaking in of our time with timeless events; with sacred events. The resurrection takes us past time and place and confirms a transcendent destiny for Jesus. This is our own hope in Christ. It is the hope of God's life giving power made possible through the risen Christ.

It is the transcendence of Christ that Thomas recognises when he proclaims: "My Lord and my God." It is Thomas's proclamation of God in Christ and amongst us. We are also called to proclaim the risen Christ. We too are part of the story. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." We are blessed with the power to experience Christ risen.

We were not with Jesus as he spoke to the crowds in Galilee, nor did we see his miracles, nor did we follow him into Jerusalem. We know Christ in a different way than the apostles. Yet, it is no less demanding, no less life changing. Jesus reveals himself to us and it is as meaningful, as frightening and as joyful as Christ's resurrection is to the apostles.

When we experience Christ it is a sacred event and it is followed with our own action. If we have not experienced we do not act. To be a believer comes with responsibilities.

Jack, Cash's brother, believed and acted on his belief even as he lay dying. His witness had a profound effect on Cash. Cash writes, "Jack has stayed with me. He's been in the songs we sang at his funeral. Wherever I go I can start singing one of them and immediately begin to feel peace settle over me as God's grace flows in."

We, living this side of the cross, live in the resurrection of Christ. And we are called to proclaim to the world Christ risen. Jesus Christ gives us life in him, demands our belief and prepares us to minister to his people.

This is radical, this is hard and goes against the cultural setting in which we live our lives- both in the understanding of our living and our dying. We want to be able to be the director of our lives and of our surroundings, often to the detriment of both.

"Walk the Line" depicts June Carter as Cash's saviour and yes she is a good woman but the life she lived was in Christ and Christ alone gives life.

Christ has conquered the world; he has conquered sin and death. Jesus' greeting, "Peace be with you" recalls his earlier words, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' The peace we share is the peace of the risen Christ. It is a peace we Christians are called to actively live.

The very pragmatic Thomas has testified, Christ is risen. The purpose of the disciples' witness of the resurrection is that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have eternal life in his name. This is what we are called in our daily lives to proclaim.

To experience the risen Christ is not popular but it is life itself.

**Christ is risen!**

**Alleluia!**