



April 24, 2022 – Easter 2 (C)
Week 1: Reflections on the Resurrection

During the Easter season, Sermons That Work is pleased to present reflections from bishops of The Episcopal Church on the resurrection of our Lord. Check back each week for a brief exploration of how Jesus Christ's rising from the grave changes everything. To listen to this reflection, scan the QR code on this page and subscribe to the Sermons That Work podcast.

The Gospel for the Sunday after Easter tells us of Thomas who, famously, in his doubt, requires the certainty of touching His Lord's hands and side before he will believe. The Lord does not rebuke him, though He does bless the later followers ready to believe without this evidence. But at the hearing of His Lord's voice, Thomas, without touching, responds in faith: "My Lord and my God." This is a reflection on these themes.

In chapter 15 of his first letter to the Church in Corinth, Paul tells us that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then "we are of all people most to be pitied" (v. 19). Apparently Eastertide is joyful, but also risky! God Himself is clearly not risk averse: witness how He enlists Adam, Abraham, Mary, etc. in risky missions with varied results. Likewise the risen Jesus Christ calls us His people to a risky following. In this vein, great modern philosophers have compared the life of faith to a gamble (Pascal) or a leap (Kierkegaard).

On the other hand, we who are "wearied by the changes and chances" of this life (Book of Common Prayer) quite reasonably come to church to rest in something that can be counted on, that is certain. Isn't this what Jesus encourages us to do when he tells us to build our homes on rock and not sand (Matthew 7:24)? How do we balance the reality of risk and the longing for something certain? How can we conceive of this certainty that does not close off our minds and hearts?

In the thirteen century, Thomas Aquinas poses for himself this very question: is hope certain (Summa II/II, 18.4)? He answered "yes and no," which may seem the kind of answer that gave scholastics a bad name! But it is what he means by "yes and no" which is helpful to us. Do we have a certain hope in Christ? Thomas replies that, insofar as we are doing the hoping, it is most uncertain, like everything about us. But insofar as it is Christ in whom we hope, it is utterly certain. By "certain," he does not mean something that can be proved with a theorem, but rather he means that the One in whom we hope is trustworthy. "Certainty," like faith, has a "fiduciary" dimension.

At the heart of the Christian life is being summoned anew by the news of the resurrection of Jesus. It does not depend on us, as if faith were some problem solved in our heads (though God does call us to faithful thinking), nor an exertion of our will (though He would have us love Him with all our wills). Rather we are continually turned away from our untrustworthy selves to our trustworthy Lord. As a result, I am given the gift of an uncertain certainty, by which, on the disciples' path, beset by doubts, I am enabled to say, "My Lord and my God."



*This reflection, titled "Certain", was written by **the Rt. Rev. Dr. George Sumner**, Bishop of Dallas. He has served, among other places, in central Tanganyika, Navajoland in The Episcopal Church, and as principal of Wycliffe College, Toronto. He has written a book on the relation of Christianity to other religions, a book on the theology of ordination, and a commentary on Daniel from a missiological perspective.*