

# EASTER 2

## Year B

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### Acts 4:32-35

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### Commentary from Sarah Neumann

What would life be like if we didn't own things? It's a difficult reality to imagine – after all, the very idea that we can and should own things is rooted so deeply into our contemporary Western society and culture that it's very difficult for most of us to imagine that it's possible that things would or could work any differently.

Ownership is often presented as a goal or an achievement: owning a home, a car, land, or various possessions – each is a symbol of success and favor. Not all human communities have embraced ownership in this way, however. The early Christian community described here in the Book of Acts is one of them; they decide to eschew private ownership and instead “everything they owned was held in common.” Not only does this enable these early Christians to help the poor and ensure that everyone has what they need, but it also liberated those who once had possessions and chose to sell them from the ways in which ownership makes an idol out of things and distracts us from what really matters: our relationships with God and each other.

### Discussion Questions

How do members of a community build trust with one another? What do you need in order to trust someone?

The early Christian community described here took a risk by choosing to live differently than most people around them. What was a time when you took a risk for the sake of the Gospel?

How would your life be different if you chose to follow the example of the Christian community in Acts?

## Psalm 133

- <sup>1</sup> Oh, how good and pleasant it is, \*  
when brethren live together in unity!
- <sup>2</sup> It is like fine oil upon the head \*  
that runs down upon the beard,
- <sup>3</sup> Upon the beard of Aaron, \*  
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
- <sup>4</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon \*  
that falls upon the hills of Zion.
- <sup>5</sup> For there the Lord has ordained the blessing: \*  
life for evermore.

### Commentary from Sarah Neumann

While some psalms express anger, frustration, or lament, this one is full of joy and gratitude, specifically for unity. Just like it was in the ancient world, unity can be hard to come by. Sometimes, we are so focused on what we want for our own lives that those individual needs start to eclipse the concerns and needs of the community as a whole. Unity is nearly impossible to achieve when this happens. But when we understand that we need one another, we start to be able to receive the blessing of unity: “life for evermore.”

It's important to make a distinction between *unity* and *uniformity*. The psalmist doesn't suggest that there is no disagreement or difference in this community of brethren who “live together in unity.” In fact, if everyone already thought and acted exactly the same way, there wouldn't be much reason to celebrate unity in the first place! Instead, the psalmist celebrates the joy and the gifts of living among people who understand that they have a responsibility to one another and have chosen to prioritize that over their own self-interests.

### Discussion Questions

Where are you seeking unity in your own life? What are the barriers keeping you from achieving it?

Is it possible to celebrate unity while also celebrating differences?

Where have you seen divisions healed or transformed in your own life, family, or community? What did it take to achieve unity in those situations?

## 1 John 1:1-2:2

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

### Commentary from Sarah Neumann

In this passage from 1 John, we see an example of what it means to share one's faith with others. The writer is sharing "the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you," an example of passing on the Christian faith from one to another. And what is among the most important tenets of the faith to share? That "God is light," a testament to God's goodness and power.

We also can see that the author of 1 John is not suggesting that being a Christian means being perfect. No reason to pretend that you are without sin, he says. It's better to confess your sins so that you can receive forgiveness, but the first step in being forgiven is being honest. Being honest about our mistakes is not always easy, though – especially when we've hurt or done harm to someone else. It's tempting to simply put our heads down and move on as if nothing ever happened. But we know, and God knows, that that is not the truth. And though God doesn't expect perfection from us, he does expect honesty and integrity.

Though sin is a part of our human lives, none of us is expected to go it alone. Christ is our constant companion and our advocate as we seek to be made whole again. Jesus stands beside us as we courageously tell the truth about our shortcomings and seek to do things differently.

### Discussion Questions

What does it mean to have integrity? Who in your life would you describe this way?

Think about a time when you asked someone's forgiveness. What happened? What emotions did the experience bring up for you?

In what situations is honesty especially challenging? Who or what strengthens you to do hard things?

## John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### Commentary from Sarah Neumann

In the verses just prior to these, Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb and finds it empty. The resurrected Jesus appears to her. She goes and tells the other disciples what has happened – “I have seen the Lord!” But the disciples are confused and scared. They don’t seem to believe what Mary has to say – or, at least, they don’t act like it. They keep the door locked, the text says, “for fear of the Jews,” a painful reminder to us of what happens when uncertainty morphs into the scapegoating of an entire group of people.

“Doubting” Thomas is not so different from all of the other disciples: he wants proof. When Jesus finally appears to him and asks, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” he is reminding not just Thomas, but *all* of the disciples that none of them believed that he had risen from the dead when Mary Magdalene delivered the news. Jesus does not let them off the hook for this, even though he knows that they are afraid and that the world outside their doors is chaotic and uncertain. Instead, he shows them that they have to learn to trust each other.

### Discussion Questions

In this passage, Mary Magdalene is not believed when she delivers news of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples. If you were in Mary’s shoes, what might that have felt like? Have you ever not been believed when you were telling the truth?

Do Thomas’ doubts make him any less of a disciple? What are some moments of doubt that you’ve experienced in your own journey of faith?