

The Second Sunday of Easter, Year B

SHOWING UP – IT'S ESSENTIAL

John 20:19-31

The Second Sunday of Easter

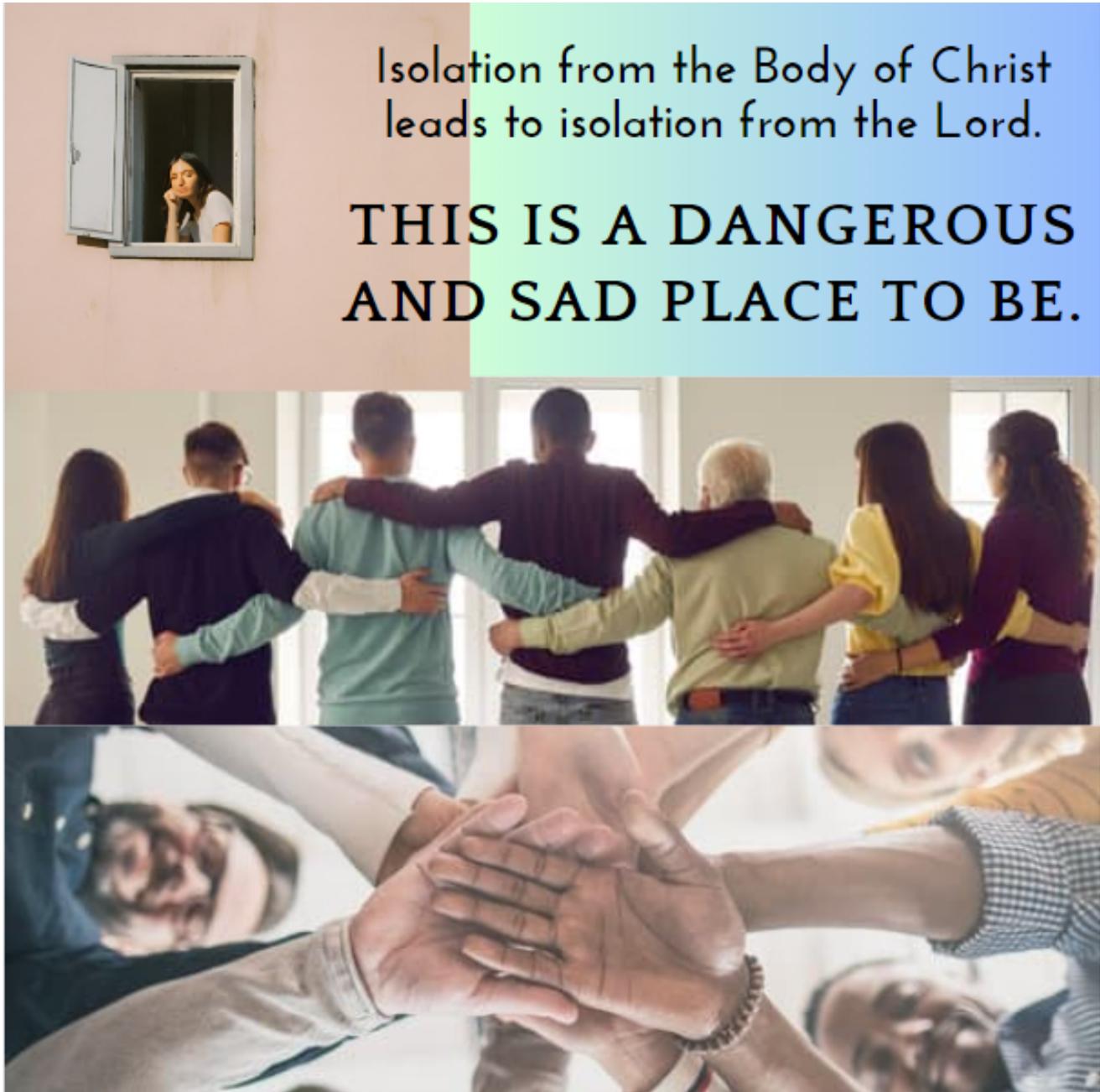
Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the 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." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So 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."

26A 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." 27Then 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." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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



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“His death on the Cross breaks down the isolation between us and God and provides the way to life in his name.”

DIAGNOSIS: The Cost of Not Showing Up

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Isolated and Afraid*

Today we hear a lot about isolation. Loneliness is endemic. Coming out of the COVID pandemic, people are reportedly more isolated than ever. An article in the *New York Times* even suggested we need a “loneliness pill.” Whatever was happening in Jerusalem following the events of the Lord’s death and resurrection, it is certain that the disciples were isolated. They were afraid, cowering behind locked doors, probably spouting one conspiracy theory after another, certain of only one thing: “They are out to get us!”

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Stubborn Unbelief*

Thomas only adds to the problem. Not only is he a member of this fearful band; He is an absent member. When Jesus shows up, he is nowhere to be found, and when he learns of the sighting of Jesus that his compatriots report, he is dismissive of the whole business. “Unless I see the very print of the nail in his hands and put my hands in his side, I will BY NO MEANS believe he was actually here!”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *A Dangerous Place to Be*

Without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives, without the fellowship that other members of God’s community provide, without the forgiveness that is promised and given to us to extend to one another, we are lost. Isolation from the Body of Christ leads to isolation from the Lord. This is a dangerous and sad place to be.



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PROGNOSIS: The Gift of Jesus Showing Up

Step 4: Initial Prognosis: (Eternal Solution): *Jesus Shows Up*
Jesus shows up! Jesus does the very thing that we cannot do; *he shows up*, even though we have given him up for dead. His death on the Cross breaks down the isolation between us and God and provides the way to life in his name. He takes our isolation in death and comes to give us his life beyond it – having the marks to prove it. Despite our locked doors, and fearful hearts, Jesus shows up, crucified and risen, with nail holes and gaping side yet plain for all to see. We are given a glimpse of the

Crucified One, simply by being present with God's people. How good it is!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis: (Internal Solution): *Faith Rekindled*

Seeing Jesus in our midst we cry out with other doubter/believers, "My Lord and My God!" It turns out that our dismissal of Jesus' risen self does not keep him from coming to us, and seeing this, we cannot but help confess our faith. We have come to believe that Jesus truly is the Messiah, and we are given life in his name.

Step 6: Final Prognosis: (External Solution): *Peace Shared*

Jesus grants us his peace, his shalom, his wholeness, and then he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He sends us out to announce the forgiveness of sins to all people, and to live into that forgiveness ourselves. We become ambassadors of Christ's peace, saying again and again to one another, and to the world, "Peace be with you." By our witness the world knows Jesus, believes, and receives life in his name.

Second Sunday after Epiphany

**"Does 'Come and see' always
work?"**

John 1:43-51

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Analysis by Peter Keyel

43The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."



The First Two Disciples – JESUS MAFA from – <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48379>

“Not only does Jesus have the power to evoke belief that Philip lacks, but even bigger things are going to happen.”

Author’s Note: In some pericopes, the challenge is finding the grace in the story or text. In this one, due to a lack of context (what was Nathanael doing under the fig tree?), the challenge is finding the law. Most “groundings” focus on Nathanael, with his sarcastic comment “Can anything good come out of Nazareth”. Despite the sarcasm, Nathanael does “come and see”, and believes so fast even Jesus is taken aback. If only mission work today were this easy! With these challenges in mind, I will focus instead on Philip, and the parts of this story that glare a bit more for those trying mission-work after Jesus’ resurrection. I should also note that in John’s gospel, Jesus and the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, are mutually related in

the work of grace.

DIAGNOSIS: We are not purveyors of God's grace

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Witnessing to a wall*

Philip did what every good disciple is encouraged to do: he witnessed to his friend, Nathanael. Maybe it's his elevator pitch... Contrast Philip's clunky and Law-centric "we have found him about whom Moses in the Law, and also the Prophets wrote" (v. 45) with Andrew's simple pitch to Simon Peter "We found the Messiah" (v. 41). Regardless of the reason, Nathanael does not buy Philip's witness. The sarcastic response to Philip's witness is disappointing.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Wanting belief*

Philip wanted Nathanael to believe. The pericope does not describe Philip's disappointment or any other emotions behind his reply, which copies Jesus' "come and see" (v. 39). Perhaps Philip's "come and see" comes from patient knowledge of "you'll be surprised". Perhaps it is borne out of a desperate attempt to get Nathanael to believe.

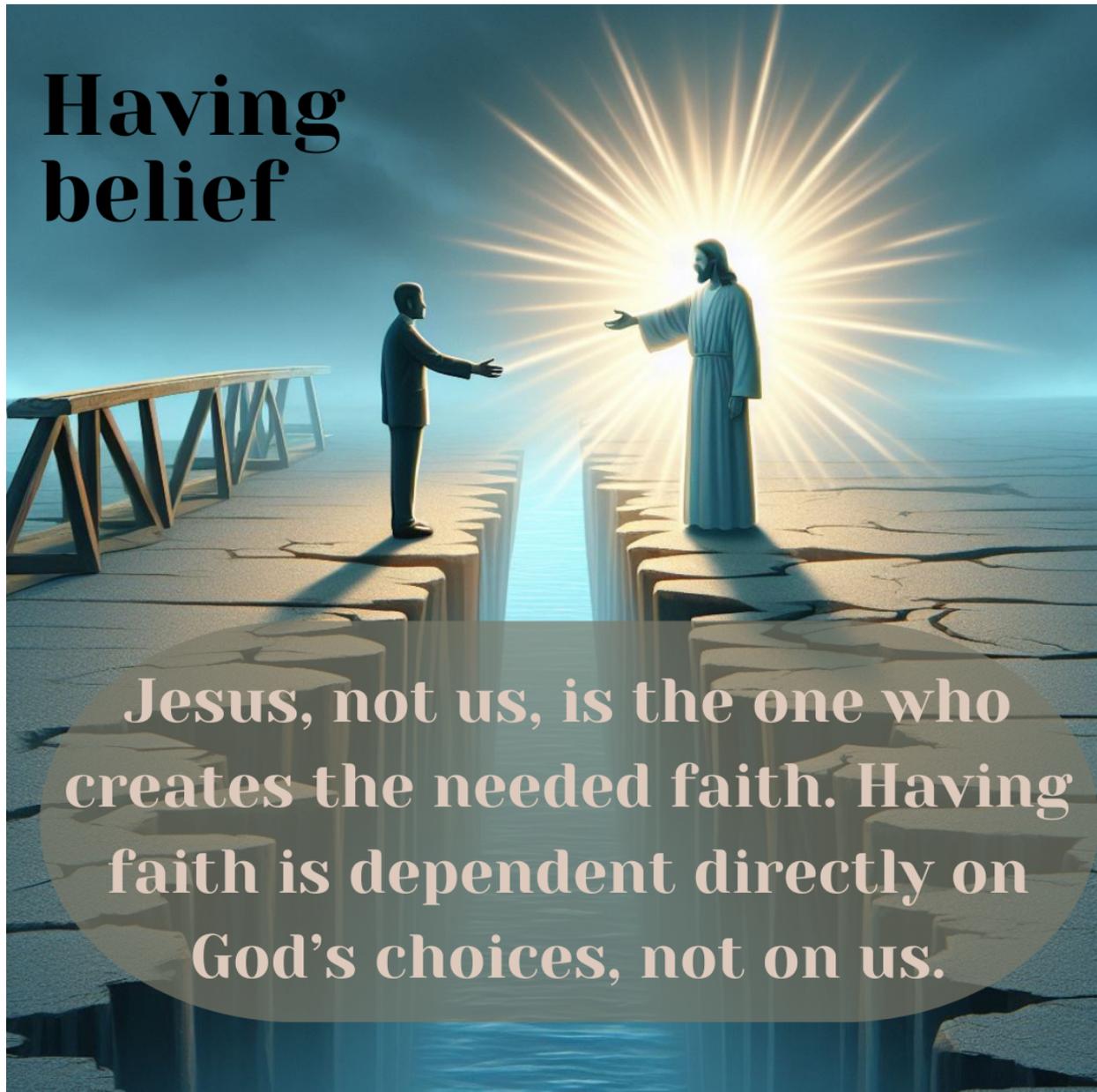
One challenge with witness is when we want people to believe, it becomes about us, instead of about them. While Philip could literally bring Nathanael to Jesus and show him Jesus in the flesh, the readers of John's Gospel cannot. What could Philip have done if Jesus hadn't been a short walk away?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Powerless*

Just in case we thought it was Philip's witness that led Nathanael to believe, Jesus removes all doubt. "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you" (v. 48). If we believe that it all depends on us, on our work, on our preaching and

witness, we miss the Source. Like Philip, our witness becomes irrelevant. Philip failed to evoke Nathanael's belief in Jesus. Philip failed to evoke belief because he is not the Source of God's grace.

What use are missionaries who fail at their job? Besides fuel for the fires of Hell?



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PROGNOSIS: Jesus gives God's grace

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *Powerful*

Jesus is God and foreshadows this to Nathanael and Philip. Not only does Jesus have the power to evoke belief that Philip lacks, but even bigger things are going to happen. Jesus closing statement for the chapter that they “will see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (v. 51) sounds glorious. And this will happen at his Transfiguration.

It will also happen at Golgotha. The Angel of Death will descend on the Son of Man as Jesus dies on the cross. Most will sneer at a powerless Jesus on the cross instead of coming to instant belief. The disciples whose belief seems strong now are scattered and hiding.

But Jesus has God's grace, and He is even more powerful than death itself. In the resurrection, Jesus reveals the true power and glory of God. That power is forgiveness for failures.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *Having belief*

We see what having belief looks like: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!” (v. 49) Jesus, not us, is the one who creates the needed faith. Having faith is dependent directly on God's choices, not on us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *Witnessing to all*

This frees us to witness without fear of failure. Philip's reply to Nathanael, “Come and see” does reflect this witness. But if we cannot show people a breathing Jesus in the flesh, what can they “come and see”? This part we see at Pentecost and in the disciples' actions in the various Acts of the Apostles and letters after the resurrection. There are many errors and

failures on the part of these witnesses; but there is also a continued faithful witness, grounded in the faith that it is Jesus who justifies, not the missionary.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

FROM NOBODY TO EMBODIED WITH GOD

Luke 1:26-38

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Paul G. Theiss

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in

her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Setting: Verses 26 and 27. Nazareth, a collection of huts in a cleft overlooking the Jezreel Valley, the highway of armies. In the distance looms Megiddo, the mountain of battle. Some of Mary’s neighbors may be arming themselves for a suicidal rebellion against Rome. “Engaged” is a misleading translation – she is enmeshed in a net of patriarchy, an object in a marriage contract between families. She has been transferred from the power of the men in her birth family to the lordship of Joseph.



The Annunciation – Joos van Cleve (circa 1485 – 1540/1541)
[From Wikimedia Commons](#)

“God’s gift of faith does its marvelous work in Mary, as it does in us.”

Diagnosis: SET ASIDE

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Alienated

Mary is a nobody, living nowhere. She remembers the promises given to her people, but in her daily reality they may seem like remote dreams from the past. Like many of us, the forces that shape her life and the life of her people are disconnected from her present needs and hopes.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Accosted

In a flash, Mary's past, present and future come together in a new reality, the angel's appearance. Gabriel's first word is a blessing, but its suddenness and power plunge her into bewilderment, push her toward a crisis of faith. Do we also hear the Word in our own bewilderment, our own crisis of faith?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Abashed

Gabriel's grace-filled explanation becomes an inescapable challenge. "You WILL conceive in your womb and bear a son... He WILL be great." Mary's fate is now pivotal to her people's future, indeed to all peoples' future. There is a great gap between our own abashed, ashamed, and humiliated lives and the presence of God. She struggles to make sense of it: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" How could I possibly be so much a part of God's program?



FROM THAT BONDING OF
SISTERS, THE CHURCH IS BORN
AND GROWS. NO MATTER
WHETHER THEIR SOCIETY
SUPPORTS THEM OR NOT, THEY
HAVE EACH OTHER - AND GOD.
AS DO WE.

Prognosis: LEADING THE WAY

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Accredited and Appointed

Gabriel expands and makes concrete the Gospel message. God will be her protector, shielding and overshadowing her. God is and will be her power. God's past, present and future come together, literally, in her.

She holds the infant who holds the world in his hands. This

child bears our shame and humiliation, even unto death, with his own outstretched hands upon the cross. And through his bearing, we are freed to be bearers of his promise – unashamed, accredited, make whole.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Awake and Alive

Because of the promise of this precious child, Mary can do this. God's gift of faith does its marvelous work in Mary, as it does in us. "Let it be with me according to your word." In Greek it's an optative, a wish that brings the future into being. Mary the Marginalized becomes Mary the Revolutionary, as she sings a few verses later in the Magnificat. Her acceptance of the Gospel brings with it suffering and new life: the crisis and joy of childbirth, the death and resurrection of her son.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Allied and Attuned

Mary is not alone in this. She takes her place as a founding member of a nourishing community of faith. Gabriel reveals that she has company, her relative Elizabeth, whom Mary will soon visit. Two miraculous pregnancies lead to a third miracle, the Spirit's connection of God's people in loving relationship.

From that bonding of sisters, the Church is born and grows. No matter whether their society supports them or not, they have each other – and God. As do we.