

# The Second Sunday of Easter, Year B

## SHOWING UP – IT'S ESSENTIAL

John 20:19-31

The Second Sunday of Easter

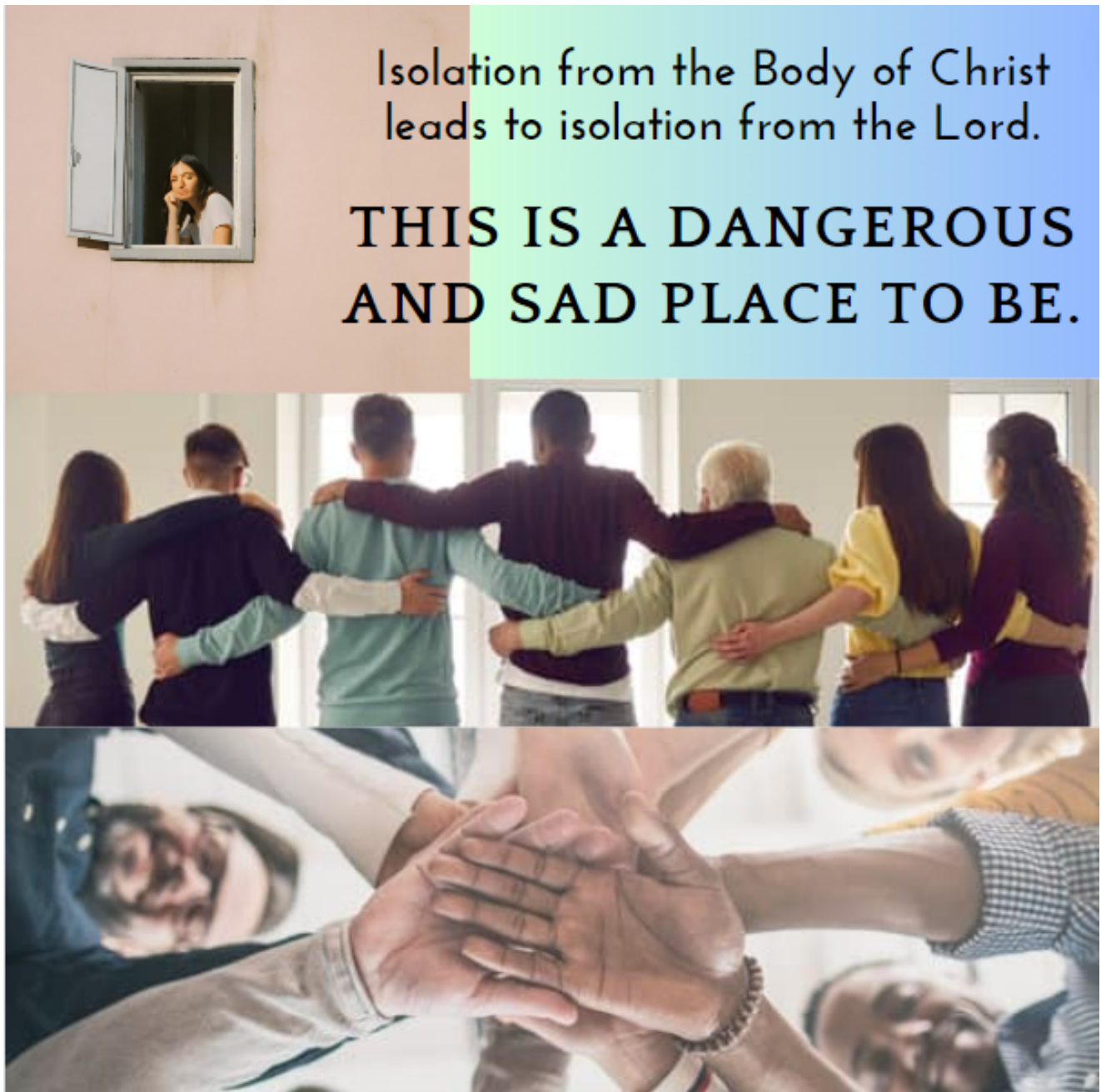
Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

*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.*



*From Canva*

*"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.



*From Canva*

## **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.

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# **Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

## **Identified with Jesus**

**Matthew 16:13-20**

**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Jonas Ellison**

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.





Hole, William, 1846-1917 [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

*It is only in our death experiences that we are open to seeing the dying and rising God that is Jesus. When our false idols are inconveniently shattered: ...This is when we can be turned outward in the fullness of our humanity.*

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Locked Cell of Secular Culture**

Throughout the ages, since medieval times, we've built a culture (in the US, at least) trapped in a closed frame of secular materialism. Today, more than ever, kids are growing up in homes that are removed from religious narrative and tradition. We've

removed most of life from connection to the big, bad, oppressive church (unless they offer a killer discounted kid-sitting service—I MEAN, Vacation Bible School program). Now that we live in a culture where the church is off our backs, we should be free just to live well and be happy, right? Well, with a quick look around, it's plain to see that, even though we have arrived at peak secularism, we still find ourselves exhausted, depressed, and isolated (maybe more than ever).

Though fewer and fewer of us partake in worship at church, we have flocked, *en masse*, to worship at the digitally optimized altar of secular performancism. Instead of allowing the nuns to rap our kids' knuckles in catechism class (thanks be to God), the rest of us rack their brains and exhaust their souls on piano, gymnastics, test prep, social activism, and a million other performance-based activities. A quick search will reveal the dismal statistics of a secular world fraught with loneliness, burnout, and despair (especially among young people). Is this really freedom from religion's oppression?

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Self Makes a Bad God***

In this Gospel story, Jesus asks his disciples who the Son of Man is. Their response points to the ancestors and prophets of old like John the Baptizer, Elijah, and Jeremiah. In other words, they had to reach all the way back to dead men as their references to the divine.

In the closed secular frame of our current culture, we have locked ourselves away from the divine mystery and inbreaking transcendence. We have closed off the possibility of a living God who moves in our lives. All we have is ourselves and the material world. Our identities are no longer tied to anything larger than our (supposed) unique individuality. The predominant



theme of our modern secular culture is the project of the self. Our task is to construct an identity that distinguishes itself from others. We must gain recognition for our specialness. If we can't broadcast our superiority to others, the only other way to gain recognition is to broadcast our oppression by them. Each player in the story is locked in resentment for the other. The underlying message of our culture is that we are our own gods.

The secular god is the individual self, and the relics we worship are countless performance-based activities and identities through which we endeavor to gain recognition. But here's where we hit a wall: Just like Elijah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, these relics are false idols. Even if we (or our kid) get into that famous college or get a job at that well-respected nonprofit. ... Even if we gain a million followers for our punditry or social activism. ... We soon discover that though these achievements might bring momentary satisfaction and low-grade happiness, they do not bring ultimate fulfillment or provide the deep narrative meaning to our lives that we humans need to feel a true sense of self (in a healthy way). All we have is a low hum of dissatisfaction and a simmering resentment towards those we've been competing with in the game of self-made identity. This is today's cultural despair. Religious and non-religious folks feel it because it is the cultural waters we swim in.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): God's Out to Put Our False Gods to Death***

As always, God, in Jesus, meets us right where we are. And right now, in our cultural moment, we are worshipping at the crumbling altar of the isolated self. It is right here in our secular malaise where God will (prayerfully) confront us. Inconveniently, when God meets us, God will not bolster our individual projects of the self. God will not pat us on the head

and shove us back into the race of performancism and resentment.

Back to our Gospel story, after the disciples say that the Son of Man is a prophet of old, Simon proclaims his revelation: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Ding, ding, ding! The revelation of Simon's good news preaches! God is not found in a concept or a set of laws or a prophet who has long been dead. God is found in the living, breathing, and walking Jesus right before them. God is the living God who moves and ministers to them in their deepest time of need.

But Jesus tells them that they are not to tell anyone. Not yet. If they do, they will get the plot wrong. They will proclaim Jesus as this water-walking, miracle-working wunderkind. But this description of God is inaccurate and only leads to despair. It is only through the trauma of the cross and subsequent resurrection that they'll be able to accurately reveal who is the living God of Israel. They are trying like mad to avoid death, while God knows that the only way to true life is THROUGH death. It is only when their Messiah rises on the other side of death that they'll be able to realize the nature of God (and themselves in relationship with God). Their current ideal of God as a warrior, revenge-getter, and life-saver must die; when he does, they, too, will go through a death experience. They will find themselves lost without a compass. And then, the living God will return and visit them in the flesh thus giving them true life in his resurrected life.

God does not meet us when we only recognize our false selves. God is determined to put the false god of the self to death. We see it happening all around us now. God is not found in our individual egos. Wholeness (righteousness) is not found in the ways we strive to gain recognition from or against others. God finds us in our death experiences at the foot of the crosses we can't help but carry. When the closed frame of our secular world

suffocates us, we will need Jesus, the living God, to kick a hole through it and pull us into new life.



From Canva

#### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Church: Giving Each Other Back to Each Other***

We find no peace in the project of self. Our culture has us so inwardly turned (the Augustinian meaning of sin—incurvatus in se) and self-obsessed that we will only find despair and disappointment. I mean, what's the point of another pay raise? What do we get from another shallow distraction or the entry into another performance-based race to the bottom? When

recognition of my contrived victimization (we see this on both the partisan left and right) only brings about more resentment, where is this short life going?

It is only in our death experiences that we are open to seeing the dying and rising God that is Jesus. When our false idols are inconveniently shattered: When we get that diagnosis... When we lose the things or the people or the recognition that we love... When we sit at the bedside of our child, friend, or loved one... When our world is turned upside down, and our individually constructed selves are shown to be whitewashed tombs... This is when we can be turned outward in the fullness of our humanity. But we cannot see or experience the living God on this side of that death experience.

This is where church, if done well, can come in. Church, in Jesus's name, can give us a community of people to share the stories of our death experiences with. In these shared stories, we, the members of the body of Christ, are brought together; not in our contrived wins, but in our suffering. When we narrate and hear these death stories, unlike the stories of our self-constructed identities that only bring resentment, we are turned towards each other in love. When we enter into each other's stories of death while being held by the resurrected Christ, God takes our death and gives us new life. This is the happy exchange, as Luther put it. Where a word about Christ is preached and experienced (God help us), our self-made false identities are put to death, and our true identities are given to us in Christ through communion with the death and resurrection of others. (This is why AA can be so powerful.)

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Freed from Resentment***

When this happy exchange happens, we are freed from the prison

of resentment and exhaustion, released from shallow competition. Our faces are yanked away from our navels, we are terminated from the empty project of the self, and we are given a new story—the eternal story of death and resurrection that we find in Jesus. We see here that our identities are not individual projects that we must grit our teeth and make brick by brick. No, this God takes us out of our secular exile. Our true, authentic identities in Christ are given to us as unexpected and non-customizable gifts that come out of our shared death experiences. Turned outward, we can see the broken but beautiful world again. We can look into another's eyes without competition or resentment. We can serve and enjoy others again. God shapes us into our own God-given identity the more we sit together and tell our stories in the name of Christ. This is where the living God does God's best work. This is when we experience the freedom of a Christian; in the place we least expect it.

### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Life Anew***

When God meets us in the unending malaise and despair of our materialistic culture, our unexpected death experiences are the portals where Jesus brings us to new life. This new life looks nothing like the lives we have been striving so hard to construct. It is a life where we look out at the world around us in wonder and love. Our redeemed and restored God-given identity looks like being a friend (and receiving friendship from others). We have been brought through our death experience into new life. Our newfound identities are a gift. We don't work out those identities in isolation behind a screen. We work them out in community with others who are free to witness to and confess their death experiences in the spirit of cruciform friendship. It is in these communities where the cross hangs—a symbol of where the living God finds us and reclaims us. We rejoice in God and are sent by the Holy Spirit to find others to commune with and minister to (and to receive ministry from). All because



Jesus intervenes and opens us to God, ourselves, and each other.