

Faith Sets Us Free

Homily by Don Maruska at St. Benedict's Episcopal Church, Los Osos, CA
Bright Sunday, April 12, 2026

Welcome to Bright Sunday! It's a tradition in Christian churches to take the Sunday after Easter as a day to catch our breath after the solemnity of Lent and the triumph of Easter. Interestingly, it's also known in Latin as Risus Paschalis – literally laughing Easter. Now, why is it called laughing Easter? Because God pulled the biggest joke of all time with Easter. You see, the authorities thought that Jesus, who had strangely accepted his fate without resistance, was dead and gone. But instead, Jesus came back! Can you imagine what crisis management was like in the temples and seats of power? They had never imagined they'd face a turn of events that would shatter the cosmos.

In preparing this homily, I was drawn to the Gospel story of Doubting Thomas. Where was Thomas when the others saw Jesus? Or, maybe ... he just missed church that week. And, as it turns out, that was the week something remarkable happened – a good message for us to be present and attentive. 😊

I identify with Thomas, because I was trained to doubt.

I grew up in the Sputnik era when there was a boom in science, and I thrived. Math and science promised clear answers, experimentally verifiable results – we could “prove” things and show our work to demonstrate how we got there.

Then, in high school debate, I learned the skills of arguing different points of view. It was a fun game, and I excelled.

Law school continued the arc of doubt with more training in how to advocate for a position (either side) using law and facts. Success required us to clearly articulate both the law and the facts and arguing the nuances for a judge or jury to decide.

In Business School and business experience, I noted how people would take on the role of the “Devil’s advocate” to critique proposals. You’ve heard it: “Let me be the ‘Devil’s advocate’ for a moment.” Often, this was to challenge a proposal that called for change. Rarely, if ever, did we talk about being “Christ’s advocate” in either business or social contexts.

For me, doubt with its insistence upon proven facts became a way for me to challenge and avoid things that might make me feel uncomfortable. Not surprisingly, doubt carried over to become a way for me to dodge the tough changes – the conversion of life -- that following Christ calls us to make.

I fear that I and others like me have become Doubt First rather than Faith First followers of Christ. Our culture has become so polarized and mechanistic in its view of life and the universe that we doubt and miss the mystery and joy of God's divine presence throughout.

This is especially the case when, unlike Thomas, we cannot physically touch the risen Jesus. We need to find new ways to connect with Christ and nurture our faith.

Sometimes, it takes a different perspective to find a new path. Last year I visited Bhutan. Nestled beneath the towering Himalayan mountains, Bhutan is a modern-day anomaly. Rather than worship the Western economic model, its core values are compassion and contentment. Compassion for all beings. And contentment – not contentment in a

lackadaisical sense, but in the sense of appreciation for what is rather than constantly striving to have more.

So, how does such a radical view of life – akin to what we aspire to as Christian conversion of life—thrive?

First, among the Buddhists in Bhutan, all of creation is divine – mountains, streams, creatures large and small. Deities are alive throughout them.

Second, they give voice to their aspirations. For example, when visiting a temple, we came upon monks and local people engaged in chanting a million prayers for peace.

Third, they provide witness for their faith. In the capital city we saw 10,000 people at a gathering for a spiritual master to impart teachings to dozens of monks. Curiously, the teachings were in a language that the 10,000 people didn't even understand. I thought to myself that I'd never sit there listening to words that I couldn't understand. So, why were they there? They were there to witness and honor the teachings.

What do these practices offer? They create a field of consciousness for people to work together toward shared ways of being. They literally resonate harmony in life through the chants and bells they employ.

The Bhutanese cultivate what I call a Faith First culture.

Western organizational thought leaders are taking note of the importance of weaving such fields of shared consciousness – alignment among people to live and work together in harmony. They see the vital need to restore and strengthen the frayed fabric of shared caring and action.

What can we learn from this about creating a Faith First culture as followers of Christ?

First, we need to see Christ's presence in all of creation. Within our own Christian tradition, leaders like Matthew Fox and Richard Rohr invite us to embrace the Cosmic Christ or Universal Christ. This is an appreciation that Christ is present not just in some closed off place but in all of creation.

I find Christ especially present for me in nature. I love nature because it gives me encounters with God, unmediated by self-serving human agendas. During the coffee hour, I'll be facilitating a conversation about ways each of us has found or would like to explore the Cosmic Christ or Universal Christ in our lives. Please join us.

Second, we need to value our practices of prayer, worship, singing, and reflection that enable us to center ourselves. I've changed my attitude about our church services. Previously, I often found the repetition of ancient scriptures and liturgies boring. I'd heard it before, and I'm someone who doesn't even go to see a movie a second time. So, what's compelling about our gatherings?

Now, I value how our services, contemplative practices, prayer beads, and more are fundamental to creating a field for Faith First. They also form a bulwark against the corrosive power of unrelenting doubt. I used to think faith meant seeing the answers clearly. Now, I suspect it means listening and walking the path.

Third, we need one another. Faith is not a solo sport. We can't weave a new fabric in a frayed world with one thread. We have a divine opportunity to be the people of God – together, for good.

To go forth as people of faith in Christ is not for the faint of heart. We need to armor ourselves for the challenges we face. We need the assurance that Christ is ever with us. We are not alone. We can seek and find Christ in all situations.

In a moment, I'm going to invite you to stand as you are able and join with me in the rousing conclusion to Hymn 370. It's printed in the Service Bulletin. This hymn, also called St. Patrick's Breastplate, is an ancient Irish hymn to remind of us of Christ's presence amidst the ills that befall us. My long-time friend and spiritual director Art Stevens with us today offered it to me as an antidote to doubt and fear. May singing this resonate within us as Christ's presence with and through us ... and our opportunity to bring this message to a world hungering for God's unconditional love.

[Hymn] **Amen**