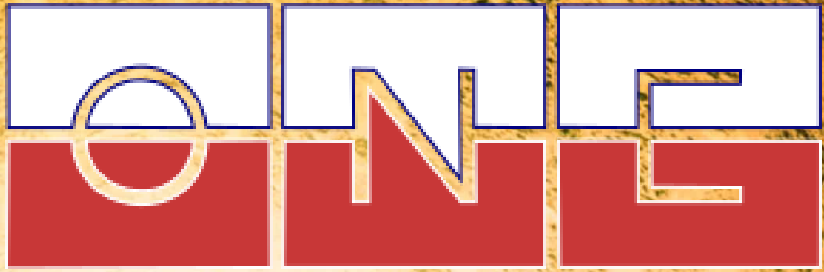
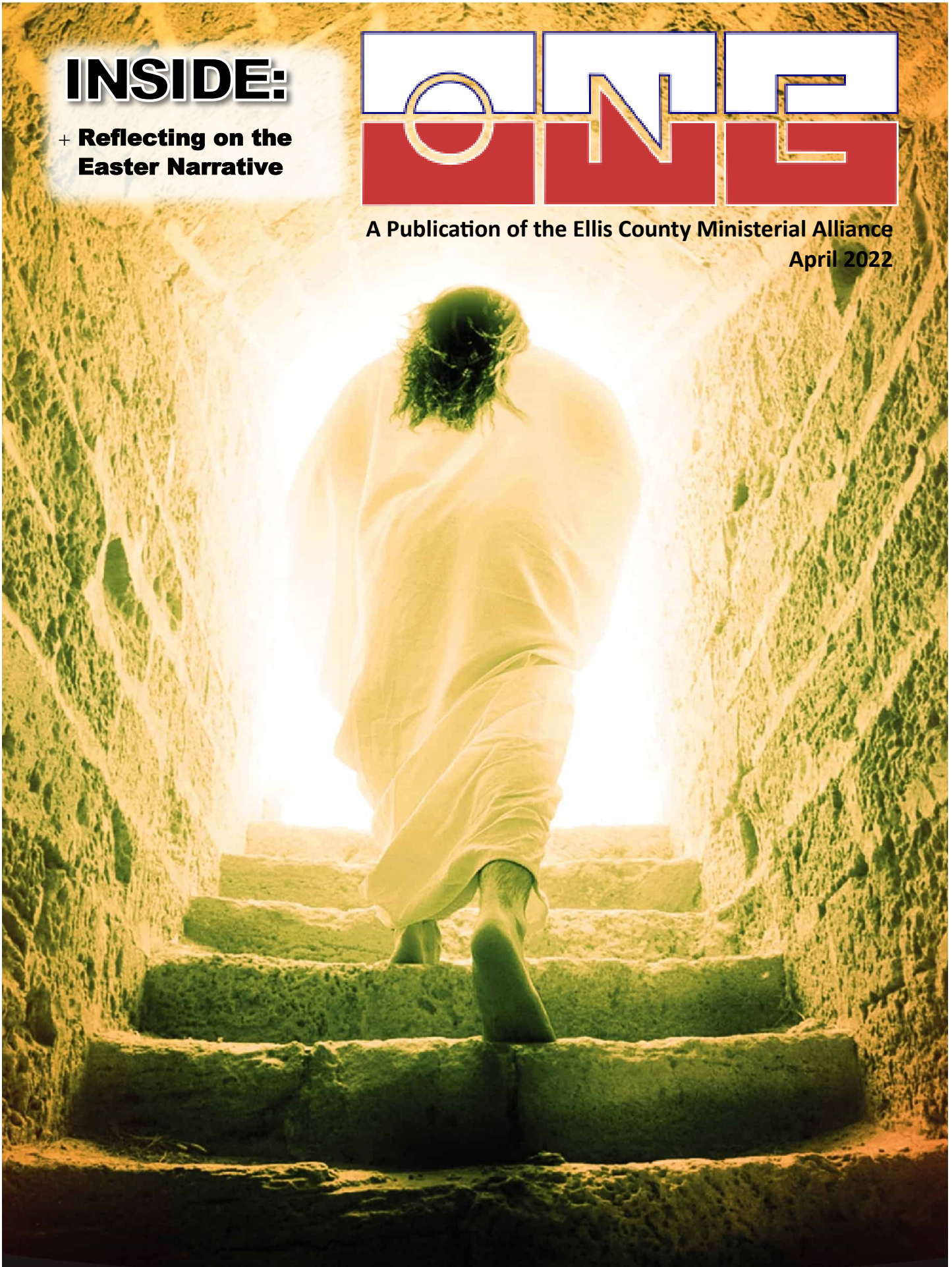


INSIDE:

**+ Reflecting on the
Easter Narrative**



**A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance
April 2022**





ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to one@ourecma.com.

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Editor's Note:

This month, our writers reflect upon the Easter narrative. Maybe these scriptures are familiar to you; maybe they are not. Regardless, we hope you will gain new insights and hope from the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Scripture: Matthew 26: 46-55 (New Living Translation):

46 *"Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here!"*

47 *And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people.*

48 *The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss."*

49 *So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Rabbi!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.*

50 *Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for." Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him.*

51 *But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear.*

52 *"Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will die by the sword.*

53 *"Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?"*

54 *"But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"*

55 *Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day."*

Do We See Ourselves in Those Who Came to Arrest Jesus?

Written by:

Brandon Nimz

At the beginning of this passage, we see Judas arrive with a force of armed people sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. These selfsame

leading priests and elders had often been criticized by Jesus for being just outside the gates of life and preventing others from entering. They were supposed to be guides that pointed to God and vehicles for God to use to reach out

to Israel, but they were failing. When seeking to handle Jesus, whom they perceived as leading others astray or as a threat to their authority, they didn't rely on God, but on worldly power—men armed with swords and clubs.

Do We See Ourselves (Continued)

I think it is good to reflect upon this point—is that ever us? Do we sometimes rely on worldly power—force, violence, and political might—to deal with those who spread messages different from what we believe to be the truth? Are we humble enough in our limited understanding and vulnerable enough in our hearts to listen to the chance of truth in their words—to see if part of their message contains a little bit of Jesus and if we ourselves may have something to learn? Even if there is nothing to learn from their message and it is actually only evil, are we relying on God or on worldly power to address it?

When the crowd approached, one of the disciples succumbed to the pressure of the armed crowd and struck first—using the tool of violence against those who would bring it—and he was rebuked by Jesus for doing so. Unlike the crowd sent by the religious leaders, this disciple was actually defending the one who brought a completely true message. Even then, he was told to put away his sword.

Again, I think it is good to reflect—if we have picked up

“swords” or “violence” instead of love, prayer, and patience, how can we lay those swords back down? How can we love our enemies better and pray for those who persecute us? How can we realize that even our enemies are actually our neighbors whom we are called to love as we ourselves were once enemies of God? How can we surrender enough to follow God's commands even when it's hard and contradicts part of our worldly desires?

Christ Himself said He could call upon God to have all of these events stopped, but He indicated He did not so that scripture could be fulfilled and God's will could be done. Is God's will that important to us? Are His commands to love others, to seek unity in love and the Holy Spirit, and to surrender our lives to gain true life something we value that highly?

This passage closes when Jesus asked the crowd why they came in such a way to arrest Him—pointing out that He was not a violent rebel and that they could have come directly to Him in the temple when He was teaching.

Though it does not say so explicitly, this rings to me of His desire to let even these men coming to arrest Him see the nature of what it was they were doing. This would give them a chance to see right and wrong and later possibly to be convicted to change. At the very least, it shows that Jesus' revolution was spiritual and not political/physical, which matches what He later told Pilate.

At this point in the passage, there are a few points we can reflect on. In an ironic way, the leading priests and elders were actually truly following God's will by failing in this instance so that scripture could be fulfilled. Thankfully, God uses evil for good and good for good. Would we rather follow God's will despite ourselves, or would we rather follow along with God, enjoying the true life that He gives when we surrender? Where might we need to surrender better to His will?



Brandon Nimz is the Director of Unite Ministry in Hays.

Scripture: Mark 15:33-41 (New Living Translation):

33 *At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.*

34 *Then at three o'clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*

35 *Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah.*

36 *One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. "Wait!" he said. "Let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down!"*

37 *Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last.*

38 *And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

39 *When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"*

40 *Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome.*

41 *They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him while he was in Galilee. Many other women who had come with him to Jerusalem were also there.*

Jesus Lived as a Human and Died as a Human

Written by:

Rev. Cana Moore

We are often afraid to speak about death. At least, most of us are. In White and Western contexts anyway, we shy away from death. Even growing older is a taboo subject. We spend money on the latest anti-aging products, we eat whatever will "keep us young," and we will jump over backwards to avoid telling others how old we are.

And I understand the instinct--if we ignore something, we think somehow it will delay it, or make it go away for a while. When we speak about someone dying, we say things like "they have

passed on" or "they are deceased." In some ways, it is as if the word death is a four-letter one, not said in polite company. In doing so, we continue our avoidance of the reality of death, its feeling of finality, its incontestability.

This passage is one from which we could have drawn out many things. We could consider those listening at the cross, the women, or other disciples. We could consider Jesus' final words. We could consider the ones who at his death rightly identify him as the son of God.

One of the most crucial parts of the Easter story for me is the reality of the death of Jesus. Jesus, the rabbi from Nazareth and

Bethlehem, the former refugee child fleeing the threat of death in his youngest days, the healer without a home, the beloved teacher was dead. He was not asleep, resting, or playing dead. He was not in some sort of stasis for a few days while they worked out the logistics and filed the paperwork to bring him back.

Christ died. No breath, no spirit in the lungs of the one who is true God from true God. His heart stopped beating, His skin cooled, and His muscles stiffened. This death was not special, but utterly ordinary.

Why is death so important to this story? Because if Jesus did not fully

Jesus Lived as a Human and Died as a Human (Continued)

die, then Jesus was not fully raised. If Jesus was not fully raised as firstborn from the dead to be glorified, then we cannot join in that process. A necessary part of Jesus' humanity was the death suffered by Jesus' body. Anything less than that would mean a false resurrection. Jesus did not hide from death, no matter His fear of it. Jesus submitted to death instead. Jesus dying also tells us that He shares every life experience with us. There is no part of life, difficult or easy, that Christ does not

share. Jesus, the most true human ever, died just as we do and will. This draws us closer to God as one who knows our lives, the sum of them. It also reminds us that there is no power in death, not any longer. Jesus is the promise, too, that death will one day be swallowed up forever. (Isaiah 25:8)

In this death, Jesus sets an example for the people of God. We do not seek out death as if it were a prize, nor do we fear it because Jesus has gone ahead of us to death and through it. We

accept death as both permanent and completely impermanent by the work of God. We find hope in death in a way that is understandably baffling to those who do not know the remarkable ways that this death accepts the limits of death, only to shatter them forever. In this defeat of death, we find hope.



The Rev. Cana Moore is the pastor of Hays Christian Church

Scripture: John 20:1-10 (New Living Translation):

- 1 *Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.*
- 2 *She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*
- 3 *Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.*
- 4 *They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*
- 5 *He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in.*
- 6 *Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,*
- 7 *while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.*
- 8 *Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—*
- 9 *for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.*
- 10 *Then they went home.*

Like the Disciples, We Are in the Midst of a Miracle

Written by:
Kathy Dinkel

I have often looked past these scriptures in the

resurrection story because I know the end of the story, and I want to get to the good part. But it's worth

taking time to soak in the reality of what was going on. Some of the disciples' emotions, fears, and

Like the Disciples, We Are in the Midst of a Miracle (Continued)

disappointments might look surprisingly familiar to our own stories in 2022.

At this point in their story, the disciples must have felt a heavy mix of fear and disappointment. For the past three years, any time they had come to an impossible situation, Jesus was there to solve it for them. But now He was dead and unable to help. They had forgotten His predicting this event (John 9:44), and their despair and disappointment were no doubt overwhelming.

Add in the fear of being hunted down by the Roman soldiers for being associated with Jesus, and I'm picturing a miserable group of people, hunkering down together and trying to sort it all out.

When Mary Magdalene decided to go to Jesus' tomb and then returned with the news that his body was taken, I imagine the disciples responding, "You have got to be kidding me!" They were already scared, sad, disappointed, and distraught, but now to have another blow of confusion

added in, they were probably feeling that this was simply "too much."

In reality, though, they had made three mistakes. First of all, they had forgotten Jesus' words that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Secondly, they had allowed negative speculations, fear, and sorrow to overtake them. Thirdly, they were totally missing the comfort and encouragement that Jesus was sending to them. Reading on in the Gospel of John and in the other Gospels, we find that angels spoke to them, but the disciples still despaired. Jesus even personally stopped to speak to Mary Magdalene, but she didn't recognize Him in her desperation.

I think a good question to ask ourselves at this point is: If we were subjected to similar circumstances, would we have had the same response? Think back on 2019-2022. How many times have we been distraught with the way things are going in our world? How often has

everything seemed so difficult that we have forgotten Jesus' promises to us? How many times have we allowed negative speculations, fear, or sorrow to overtake us, or failed to recognize the comfort and encouragement that Jesus has sent to us?

The key is to read to the end of the story. The disciples were in the midst of an amazing miracle. John was catching a glimpse of hope in this passage in verse 8, and reading on in verses 11-18, Mary Magdalene was visited by angels and by Jesus.

How about you? Where are you in the narrative arc of your own story? If things are looking negative, scary, or sorrowful, then hold on with faith. You haven't read to the end. You are in the midst of a miracle. Remember: "Everything is possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23 NIV).



Kathy Dinkel is a member of Liberty Foursquare Church in Hays.

Scripture: John 10:19-29 (New Living Translation):

19 *That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said.*

20 *As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!*

21 *Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."*

22 *Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*

23 *"If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

24 *One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came.*

25 *They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."*

26 *Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said.*

27 *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"*

28 *"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.*

29 *Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."*

Jesus Calls Us to 'See' Without Physically Seeing Him

Written by:
Cheryl Glassman

After I read John 10:19-29, I imagined what it might be like sitting among the disciples behind a locked door. They had to be so confused. The Thursday prior, Jesus had broken bread with them and told them, "This is my body; this is my blood."

Then, Judas had betrayed Jesus. The guards took Jesus away, and the chief priests and the people turned against him. All his disciples had run away in

fear. Their master, leader, Messiah, had been tortured and crucified. Can you see them? Their hopes were dwindling, their faith waning.

And then--Jesus appears to them. All of them but Thomas, that is. Imagine their excitement, explaining the visit to Thomas, and Thomas not believing a word of it. You may think, "How could he not believe all of the other disciples?" It is not unlike many things that have happened in our world today. Things are hard

to believe sometimes, if we are not experiencing them, seeing them, for ourselves.

Some people even might experience something and still not believe. I know I have been involved in certain things, and if someone doesn't believe it, after a while I myself start to question what happened, even though I went through the situation.

When my mother was hospitalized after a stroke, she was on a ventilator and in a coma for almost three

Jesus Calls Us to 'See' (Continued)

weeks. The neurologist told us there was not much hope. We stood vigil and took turns sleeping at her bedside. Suddenly one night, she woke several times and looked at me. Every time I would run to tell the nurses, but when they came to the room, Mom would not respond. The nurses even sent a chaplain in to talk to me, thinking I was just "hoping for the best" to happen. I began to think I was just imagining things.

The next night, a nurse came in and asked if I was Cheryl. I thought, "Oh boy, here we go again." The nurse said she worked in a brain trauma unit and that she believed my mom was waking and trying to talk to me. She said she had seen it happen many times. After she left, I felt so relieved and renewed. The very next day, Mom awoke from her coma. The nurses and doctors were amazed.

I think the disciples might have been

wondering if what they experienced had really happened. Therefore, it seems to me Jesus had bigger things to do than convince Thomas with his second visit. I think Jesus came back the second time not JUST for Thomas, but for all of the disciples. Jesus knew he needed to be with all of the disciples again, to uplift and nurture their spiritual and physical well-beings with his holy presence. Their faith, their belief in him had to be thoroughly strengthened for the mission Jesus had in store for them. Such a gift to be in the spiritual and physical presence of Jesus as he breathed the Spirit upon them, helping them to renew their faith.

Nelson's "Bible Dictionary" defines faith as "a belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to his will for one's life...to place one's trust in God's truth...to take God at his word and trust in him for salvation."

This is what Jesus calls each one of us to see and live. We "see" without seeing; we believe through our faith. Our faith, like that of Thomas and the disciples, will be and has been tested. There is no doubt about that. I believe faith tested and renewed is faith strengthened. I think of all the millions of Christians throughout the world who "believe without seeing" Jesus and how each individual endures trials that test their faith in Jesus. But I also think about Thomas, who gave all the disciples, and, hence, all of us a chance to share Jesus' love and our faith in Him through our lives.

May this holiest of seasons nurture and strengthen you for your journey. Have a happy and blessed Easter!



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