

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2025
SERMON: We Have Seen the Lord!
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 20:19-31
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JOHN 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." **22** And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. **31** But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon: We Have Seen the Lord!

The final chapter of John, according to Bible scholars, was written as a caution against the Gnostics—which is also why the Gospel of Thomas never made it into the Canon.

Okay, so I just dropped some fancy theology words on you like “Canon” and “Gnostic”, which means it’s one of those Sundays where I need you to put on your *Bible Nerd glasses*.

The scripture we read today features “Doubting Thomas”—the disciple who didn’t believe Jesus had come back until he could *literally* stick his fingers into Jesus’ wounds. Spiritually, Thomas represents all of us who struggle to trust God. Every one of us has had a Thomas moment—a season of doubt, of hesitation, of asking God, “Are You really there?”

But there’s more going on in this passage than just spiritual skepticism. This isn’t only a story about trusting God; it’s a story about recognizing God *right in front of us*. It’s a call to see Jesus as He is—not a ghost, not a metaphor, not a memory—but as *real and present and alive*.

Now, to understand the full weight of that, we need a little historical context.

The Gospel of John was the last of the four canonical Gospels written. (“Canonical” just means it made the official list of books that were approved by the early Church councils: the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and the Council of Rome in 382 AD.) These guys—let’s call them the *Councils of Important Dudes*—got together to standardize Christian teaching, and they gave us Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

One of the books that *didn’t* make the cut? The Gospel of Thomas*.

Why? Because the Jesus in that version doesn’t suffer. He doesn’t die. He doesn’t even seem particularly *human*. The Gospel of Thomas is considered a Gnostic text. Gnostics were a growing movement in the early Church who believed that Jesus was never really human—just a divine spirit here to give us secret wisdom about the afterlife.

Their Jesus wasn’t into healing with mud and spit. He didn’t break bread with sinners. He didn’t weep. He didn’t bleed. He didn’t rise from the dead—because he never really *died*.

In fact, in the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus mostly floats around like some cosmic guru offering cryptic advice. The message is all about escaping this messy, flawed world and entering a purely spiritual realm. It’s got more in common with Eastern mysticism than with the earthy, embodied, neighbor-loving Jesus we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And just to really drive home how different it is—the Gospel of Thomas ends with the male disciples plotting to get rid of Mary because she’s not the “ideal” spiritual being (i.e. a man). Jesus tells them not to worry, that Mary can become male in the spiritual realm and still enter the Kingdom of Heaven. If that sounds bonkers to you, you’re not alone.

So why does this matter to us here in Hawai‘i in 2025? I mean, the Councils of Important Dudes shut this Gnostic thing down over 1,600 years ago, right?

Here's why it matters: ideas *don't die*. They recycle.

As Ecclesiastes says, "There is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

You've probably heard this before: "I like Jesus—I just don't buy that whole Son of God, died-and-rose-again thing." Or maybe: "Jesus was a great moral teacher, a revolutionary even—but God in the flesh? Come on." These are modern-day Gnostic statements. They separate the Jesus we like—gentle, wise, good with kids—from the Jesus who *suffered, died, and rose again in a body*.

People have all kinds of good reasons to dislike Christians, or organized religion, or the institutional Church. I get it. I've got my list too. But very few people say, "I hate Jesus." Even fewer say, "That Jesus guy? Total nutjob."

No, they say, "He was a great teacher. A prophet. A beautiful soul."

But Jesus doesn't leave us that option.

C.S. Lewis, the same guy whose *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* our keiki will be performing in August, once wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God—or else a madman or something worse."

That's what the Gospel of John is confronting, head-on.

John's Jesus says: *I am the way, the truth, and the life.*
I and the Father are one.
I am the resurrection and the life.

That's not philosophy. That's a claim. And if it's not true, it's madness. But if it *is* true, then it changes *everything*.

That's why John's Gospel ends not with an idea, but with a body. A *wounded, hungry, breathing* Jesus. Not a ghost. Not a spirit guide. Not a poetic metaphor for new beginnings. A man who still bears the scars of crucifixion, who walks through locked doors and says, "Hey, do you guys have anything to eat?"

It's messy. It's inconvenient. And it's the whole point.

God came *here*. Not to whisk us away to some ethereal elsewhere, but to redeem this world—this life, this body, this flesh made of mud and breath and starlight.

This is a God who gets His hands dirty. Who eats fish for breakfast. Who cries with mourners, dances at weddings, bleeds, heals, laughs, and suffers. This is a God who came not just to save our souls—but to restore our lives.

The kind of lives that involve dishes in the sink. Kids with scraped knees. Medical bills. Grief. Joy. Family drama. Broken dreams. And yes, resurrection. Jesus doesn't call us to escape this world—He calls us to *transform it*.

He calls us to build communities that heal, churches that raise children and care for kūpuna, worship spaces that actually *welcome* people. And that kind of resurrection? It takes disciples who are willing to *invest*. It takes people willing to see Jesus—wounded, hungry, and *very much alive*—and say, “Yes, Lord. Come and eat.”

Thomas touches the wounds and declares, “My Lord and my God.” He gets it. Not a ghost. Not a metaphor. Not a myth. But *God in the flesh. Resurrected. Present. Now.*

On Easter morning, we say: *He is Risen!* And the Church responds: *He is Risen Indeed!* Hallelujah. But when the disciples tell Thomas about seeing Jesus, they don't say, “He is risen.” They say: “*We have seen the Lord.*” That's not a doctrinal statement. That's a *testimony*. A proclamation of an encounter that changed them.

Friends, Jesus isn't just “out there” in heaven, waiting for us to die and go find Him. Jesus is *here*. In the now. Transforming us. Uplifting each other. Moving through our church, our community, our stories.

“He is Risen” is a declaration about Christ.

“We have seen the Lord” is our response.

It's what we say when our eyes are opened and we realize: Jesus is *already* among us.

So, Church, let's feed the Body. Let's invest in resurrection. That means showing up, serving, and supporting the ministries God is growing among us, like the Pastoral Development Program and the Keiki Summer Camp. It means making time to build your spiritual foundation by being present with one another in our upcoming Discipleship Groups and Alpha Program. These aren't abstract ideas or far-off dreams. They are real, Spirit-inspired movements happening here and now, through our own hands and hearts, because Christ first gave everything for us. We are Easter people. We have seen the Lord. And because of that, we can't help but respond—with our presence, our gifts, our service. Jesus is alive, and He is still showing up right here, in our small but faithful church, and in each of our fragile human hearts, asking, “Is there anything to eat?”

Let's be the ones who say, “Yes, Lord. Come and eat.”

Amen.

*The Gospel of Thomas: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>