

April 19, 2026  
The Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2: 14a, 36-41  
Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19  
I Peter 1: 17-23  
Luke 24: 13-35

---

How many of you are familiar with a game show called *To Tell the Truth*?

The premise of the show is simple...you have 3 contestants...and 3 panelists. The host asks each contestant, "*What is your name, please?*". All three answer the same name.

*I am John Smith. I am John Smith. I am John Smith.*

Then, the host tells a story about *John Smith*. The panelists begin asking questions to determine who is the *real* Mr. Smith. There is one rule...the actual subject of the story must always tell the truth and the 2 imposter contestants can make up any answer they want in order to convince the panelists that they are the real John Smith.

At the end of the game the panelists cast their vote for who they think is telling the truth. The host then says..."*Would the real John Smith please stand up.*"

No matter how convincing the imposters might have been, there is only one right answer. There is only one *real* John Smith.

***As I thought about this game show, I started to think about Jesus.***

More specifically, I thought about who the *real* Jesus might be. Who was this man who showed up after his resurrection and how are we to understand him? Since Easter Sunday we have had three different accounts telling us the story of what Jesus did after he was resurrected.

- In Matthew, Mary encounters an angel and then suddenly out of nowhere is greeted by Jesus.
- In John, Jesus walks through walls and appears in front of the disciples and even lets Thomas touch his wounds.
- In Luke, Jesus walks alongside Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, has a nice chat and then eats a meal with him.

That means 3 different groups of people had 3 different perspectives on who Jesus was and what this resurrection meant to them.

If Jesus were on *To Tell the Truth*, I imagine a panelist might ask...*Jesus, how did people know you were truly the resurrected son of God?* And we might hear three different answers depending on how Jesus wanted to tell us about his identity.

The challenge for us is how we choose to interpret each answer. If we were panelists, hearing those 3 stories, we might resonate with one story more than another. One might feel a little more accurate than the others. And so we start to consider...*maybe this is the real Jesus*. And we might begin to build a narrative around that understanding.

We have encountered Jesus one way and we let that encounter create our definition of what the resurrection is all about. That's not bad necessarily but it raises concerns if we let that one encounter become our only encounter.

I was struck by an idea that was presented by Bishop Jake Owensby in his essay on this week's Gospel. He considered that encountering Jesus is something that should happen over and over again...in different ways throughout our life. And that the heart of the Christian life is our on going encounter with Jesus on the different roads we may travel. In other words, our understanding of Jesus grows and expands the more we engage our journey of faith.<sup>1</sup>

***Our depth of understanding is never a one and done encounter.***

However, too many times we stop with a singular encounter of Jesus and name that encounter as the one and only way to understand Jesus. We create a single-faceted faith with one exclusive theological lens. A proprietary claim that shuts out an expansive expression of love and mercy and grace.

In one way, this is understandable...it's how we have built so many different denominations. Did you know that it is estimated that there are approximately 45,000 Christian denominations worldwide? That's a lot of ways that we have defined our understanding of Jesus.

Some of these distinctions grew out of worthwhile theological debates on doctrine and worship practices. Others, however, grew out of division and conflict around issues of morality or societal norms. Still others offered a path towards control and power for a select few of "chosen" individuals...claiming Jesus on their side and their side alone.

So, out of those 45,000 interpretations...which is right?

***If we asked the real Jesus to stand up...who would we meet?***

We know the core teachings of Jesus. No matter how we may personally experience Jesus or how we may interpret what he taught, the teachings remain the same...

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.*

***That's it. That's the real Jesus.***

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://jakeowensby.substack.com/p/meeting-jesus-again>

And the real Jesus also taught us how we are to carry out those commands. Jesus taught us to live with humility and mercy, to be peace-makers, to feed the hungry and care for the sick, to welcome the stranger, and stand up for the oppressed.

As theologian Daniel Maguire states in his book *A Moral Creed for All Christians*, the truth of the Gospel will always be....*"paralleled with justice and coupled with love."* Maguire goes on to say that the Jesus we seek, the real Jesus, will not just inform us as people of faith, it will transform us into people of the truth.<sup>2</sup>

And that's why we have to keep meeting Jesus. Not once but over and over again. We keep meeting him so that we encounter his truth in all of its diversity so that we may more fully and honestly embody that truth. It's those encounters that transform us from our individual theological, political, and social camps into a stronger, more unified community of truth-seekers.

C.S. Lewis reminds us that, *"Theories about Christ's death aren't Christianity: they're explanations about how it works."*<sup>3</sup> The theories are secondary to the real gift of what Jesus did for us and continues to do for us.

I really want us to take this message to heart. Because as we grow into more and more divided camps of religious belief coupled with political posturing, I want to encourage us all to take a step back. Remember that what you are hearing is simply someone's *explanation* of Jesus, someone's *claim* on Jesus, someone's *manipulation* of Jesus and of what his teachings are supposed to mean.

***But no matter what interpretation you might hear, the teachings never changed. Only our use of those teachings has changed.***

So what does that mean for us as Episcopalians?

We are a denomination that stands together in common prayer and common practice...a practice that is grounded in love and mercy and peace-making. A practice that invites us all to encounter Jesus together, over and over again for as long as it takes to become a loving, life-giving community for all people....no exceptions.

We even explain that practice in our [Baptismal covenant](#). Our promise is that we will continue to learn and pray together. We will love our neighbors as ourselves and strive for justice and

---

<sup>2</sup> Maguire, Daniel C. *A Moral Creed for All Christians*. Fortress Press, 2005. p139.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, C. S. *The Case for Christianity*. Macmillan, 1944. P.46.

peace among all people respecting the dignity of every human being. This is our ongoing effort to live by Jesus' example.

And so when we ask the real Jesus to stand up, I don't think he is going to stand with any one religious or political group.

***He is going to simply ask...did you do what I taught you to do?***