

Never-ending story: Acts 5:27-32; John 20:19-31

by [Sarah Dylan Breuer](#) in the [April 3, 2007](#) issue

"We are witnesses to these things," said Peter (Acts 5:32). As the gospel for the second Sunday of Easter opens, "these things" do not include Jesus' resurrection—not exactly, anyway. That morning Peter had seen an empty tomb with some scattered linens. He had witnessed absence, not resurrection. At that point, he had not even witnessed Jesus' death, as four women had along with "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 19:25-26). He had missed his chance to witness there. But by the early days of the church as described in Acts, Peter is among the boldest and most powerful of witnesses to Jesus' message, death and resurrection. Clearly something happened. Peter had lost his chance—but the story doesn't end there, for Peter or for us.

Peter's story continues in the locked room where, for the first time, he truly witnesses Jesus' resurrection. That night, Peter meets the Jesus whom the women had seen earlier; he sees that Christ crucified is now Christ raised from the dead by the God of Israel.

Both parts of that twofold witness—that God has raised Jesus from the dead, and that it is the very same Jesus whose life Peter and the others had witnessed—are crucial. Let me put it this way: Imagine getting the news that last week in Minnesota, a man named Jim Gundersen was executed as a criminal and certified as dead, and now, three days later, is alive again. I'm guessing that your reaction would be far closer to "Huh, that's weird!" than to "Wow, tell me where he is, that I may worship him!"

If all we knew about Jesus of Nazareth was that he had been crucified and rose from the dead, it would be little more than fodder for some ancient version of supermarket tabloids. The crucial claim is that the Person raised, the One God vindicated with the resurrection of the righteous, was Jesus of Nazareth. This was the Jesus who healed and empowered those whose sicknesses or social status placed them at the margins; who broke bread with anyone willing to share it; who loved enemies as well as neighbors; who treated as family any who sought God's kingdom. This was the Jesus who from the day of his baptism in the Jordan boldly

confronted the powers and principalities that divide and oppress people made in God's image. This Jesus embraced and empowered the marginalized, scandalizing the religious authorities and threatening even the might of Rome—and was put on a Roman cross. With that, the story ended, as far as the authorities were concerned—a shameful end for a man who behaved shamefully as well as disruptively, a cursed end fitting for one whose behavior offended God. That's the story that the wounds on Jesus' lifeless body were inflicted to tell.

But these earthly powers didn't get to write the end of the story. God—the very God whom the religious authorities said was offended by Jesus' behavior and blasphemed by Jesus' claiming God's authority for his behavior—raised Jesus from the dead in glory and placed him in ultimate authority. And in the company of Mary Magdalene—who supported Jesus all the way to the foot of the cross—and Peter and Thomas, “we are witnesses to these things.”

We weren't in first-century Palestine to break bread with Jesus or to stand at the foot of the cross, but we have seen how Jesus' life scandalized the rulers and empowered the outcasts. Whenever Christians join in solidarity with the poor to share their suffering and offer Jesus' healing presence, there is the wounded body of Christ as well as the glorious, abundant and eternal life of the risen Christ. When we follow Jesus to serve those whom he served, we see Jesus' wounds. As we seek Christ in others, we see this wounded Jesus, this scandalous Jesus risen in glory. In that vision, Jesus' wounds become testimony both to the righteousness before God of Jesus' scandalous way of life and to the power of God to overcome the powers that oppress.

I've often wondered what it was that took Thomas away from Peter and the others that first night of Easter. Whatever it was, he missed Jesus and what Jesus gave them: the peace and the commission and the Holy Spirit to sustain them in that commission. I've been there. My courage and imagination fail, fear takes over, and I turn away from the wounds that could bring me to wholeness if I faced and touched them.

But the story never ends there. A week after Thomas's missed opportunity, Jesus comes back with a greeting of peace and an invitation to experience the wounded and risen life of the Christ. Legend has it that Thomas was so transformed and inspired that he proclaimed the Good News in Syria and India, and gave his life in imitation of the one whose wounds he had touched.

That word of peace and invitation to witness is never withdrawn from us because it comes from Jesus, whose character it is to knock at every door (Rev. 3:20) and to whom no door is locked. Even in the confusing and dreamlike (and at times nightmarish) imagery of the book of Revelation, that is good news.

When human history seems like a spiral of violence from beginning to end, we can remind ourselves that Jesus is Alpha and Omega, that the Judge is the Reconciler. When something or someone whispers to us that we've missed our chance individually and collectively for wholeness, we know that Jesus still invites us to join with the wounded body of Christ among the marginalized and experience the abundant, eternal and joyous life of the risen Christ. We too are witnesses of these things.