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Sermon Title: Total Eclipse of the Heart

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Text: [John 20:19-31](#)

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We are one day until the solar eclipse passes over North America, with the Indianapolis area being in the path of totality, meaning for around three minutes tomorrow afternoon, it will become completely dark and then go back to light. Of course, an eclipse is when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun. The next total solar eclipse in the United States will not happen for another 20 years, in August of 2044. The next time that it will be full totality in the Indianapolis area will be 2153.

I imagine it will be a little disconcerting to be dark when it is not supposed to be. The temperature will drop and it may feel like something is off, something is out of place.

This is the second Sunday of the Easter season, but really it feels like the Sunday *after* Easter. It may also be the day people are driving back from Spring Break, trying to get back from their travels for the eclipse, along with everyone else on the road trying to get to this area.

We are still celebrating the resurrection, and more importantly, we are still considering what the resurrection means for our lives and for the world. We are continuing the work of figuring out how best to open our hearts to what God is doing, to open our hearts to the gift of new life.

In the Gospels, Jesus' followers are doing this same thing. They're questioning how best to open their hearts to what Jesus' resurrection means. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus appears to his disciples on the evening of the resurrection. But one of them, Thomas, is not there.

He doesn't quite know what to make of what the others are saying:

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came.
²⁵ The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe.

The next time we are expected to see a total eclipse in the Indianapolis area is 2153, so when people say the eclipse here is a once-in-a-lifetime event, they mean it.

Maybe Thomas feels a bit like he missed a once-in-a-lifetime event. Or maybe Thomas is pragmatic. He's taking stock of the situation before making his decision. He needs more evidence before he is to believe the testimony of the others.

I've come to think that Thomas's request to see the nail marks and to physically touch the risen Christ isn't so much what he needs in order to believe but more so mocking the disciples' claim. He thinks it will never happen.

He is closed off to the possibility that Jesus is indeed alive. A total eclipse of the heart, perhaps.

Thomas isn't there. Where is he? I suspect, because he is pragmatic and practical, because of what happened days before when Jesus died on a cross, Thomas even in grief, got on with his life. Perhaps he even felt a little foolish for giving up so much in order to follow Jesus, only to watch him die at the hands of the Roman Empire. Jesus was dead as were all of the hopes and dreams of the past three years.

My question for us today is this: Are we closed off to the possibility that Jesus is indeed alive? Are our hearts open to the possibility that life can be different?

Maybe another way to ask this question is, "What gets you out of bed each day?"

The Japanese have a word for what gets us out of bed. A man told the story of being a young child when he and his family, along with 10,000 Japanese Americans, were incarcerated at the Granada Relocation Center in Colorado during World War II. They had been forcibly exiled from their communities, grieving the loss of home, routine, and rhythms of life. Suddenly they were surrounded by barbed wire fencing and tall watchtowers surrounded by armed guards.

To combat their grief and hopelessness, the internees had to find a reason to get out of bed. They took to farming the 9,000 acres of the compound, growing a variety of crops and raising livestock. They needed a reason to keep going, to keep living in the midst of atrocity. The man said the Japanese called this *Ikigai*.

Ikigai is the sense we have when we wake up that today is not trivial, that it matters, that there are new experiences waiting for us, and that even in the worst of circumstances, beauty and meaning are on our doorstep. *Ikigai* is having our hearts can be opened to possibility even in the worst of circumstances.

Eight days later, Jesus returns and Thomas is confronted by the Risen Lord:

After eight days, his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you."²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!"

²⁸Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-28)

It shortchanges what happens here to make this encounter simply about belief. That is a part of it, but more so it gives Thomas a sense of purpose; it gives Thomas a reason for living.

It changes Thomas's perception of what is possible, of what God can do. of what God can do through him. I suspect that we close ourselves off to God's possibilities. One of the biggest mistakes we can make in life is to make a temporary dwelling place a long-term abiding place.

The eclipse of Thomas's heart was merely a temporary dwelling place, but it could have been much more.

We are challenged to change our perception of what resurrection means, of what God can do, and of what God will do through us.

Peter Gomes, the late chaplain at Harvard, tells about the time he went to speak at a prep school in the countryside of New Hampshire. It was a really out-of-the-way place, and there was a mandatory attendance event for the students. It was one of those moments when the audience didn't really want to be there, and in this case, the speaker didn't really want to be there either. But in this moment, for the student body and for Peter Gomes, they were stuck there with one another

He went through his prepared talk, and it went well, better than either side expected. They got to the conclusion of the talk and into the question and answer session.

A boy stood up in the middle of the large hall and asked Gomes, "What inspires you?"

Do you have those moments when you open your mouth, and you expect something to come out but it doesn't? Gomes expected either God or Harvard to be the answer to the question of what inspires him. He said what inspires him is the beginning of each new day. He said, "I rejoice each day that I have a chance to start over."

Resurrection means that we get to start over. It is a new day. Is your heart open to the possibility of resurrection in your life? In our local community? In the world?

Are you open to all the possibilities God has for you?

Let Us Pray:

God, we believe that you show up in our lives.

We believe that you show up in the world.

We believe in you, the God who takes on flesh and changes everything.

May the resurrection bring us hope, bring us new purpose, and open our hearts to the possibilities you have for our lives. =

So, today we give you our hearts, our whole hearts and nothing less.

Amen