

Now what?

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 3, 2013](#) issue



Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, oil in canvas, 1601–1602.

What is there about Easter for a clergyperson not to love? Sanctuaries and worship spaces are decorated with beautiful flowers. The hymns are triumphant, often with brass players augmenting a strong organ and full choir. Children sport new outfits and some women even wear hats. Best of all, the pews are full. Even though we know better, for a moment or two we ministers entertain the notion that Easter Sunday is “all about me,” that “all these people have come to hear what I have to say, and if I get it right this year, they’ll be back next Sunday for more.”

Some preachers even scold those who last showed up at Christmas—“Chreasters,” as Molly Worthen called them in a *New York Times* editorial (December 23, 2012). I sometimes poked a little fun at Chreasters by reminding the crowd that we “do this” every Sunday, same time, same place. It always got a laugh. But if you come to church just once a year, why wouldn’t you come on Easter, when the church lays it all on the line?

Most pastors take a break after the intensity and busyness of Lent, Holy Week services and then the Easter vigil on Saturday evening and sunrise services and a full schedule of Sunday services on Easter Day. Almost every year I took off a week or two. Yet I have always felt that the days and weeks after Easter are the most important of the church year. Those who come to church on the Sunday after Easter are the deeply faithful, the steady, loyal heart of any congregation. Theologically and homiletically, the issues in the days and weeks after Easter are “Now what?” and “So what?” Those in the pews during Eastertide have these questions on their minds.

I’ve always loved the authentically human way Jesus’ friends conduct themselves after the crucifixion and resurrection appearances. According to the fourth Gospel, they essentially did nothing. They hid in a locked room in Jerusalem, waiting for things to settle down so they could sneak out of town and return to the lives they’d had “before Jesus.” Then Christ appeared to them, and his first words were: “Peace be with you,” followed by “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” Send. That’s the answer to “Now what?” People who experience resurrection are “sent.” And that’s the answer to “So what?” People who have experienced the victory of life and love over evil and death are to leave the room—the safe, secure place—and go back out into the world.

That is why the days and weeks after Easter are so important. Friends of Jesus, fresh from triumphant celebration, were sent back out into same world that rejected, tortured and killed him—which is to say into the world in which we live.

I understand the impulse to stay in that room. The world looks ominous and disconcerting and frightening. North Korea has nuclear weapons and seems ready to use them. Iran continues, undeterred, to develop nuclear capacity. Israel does not seem much interested in a resolution with the Palestinians. Suicide bombers in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan do their ghastly work as American troops prepare to come home. At home fiscal issues seem unresolvable.

The “Now what?” and “So what?” of Easter are that people who have experienced resurrection are sent into the world to live intentionally, faithfully, courageously—and with those haunting first resurrection words burning in their hearts. “Peace be with you. . . . As the Father sent me, so I send you.”