

# **April 24, 2022 – Second Sunday of Easter**

## **John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**It always feels a little unfair that one particular disciple gets called out and long-remembered as “Doubting Thomas.”**

**It’s a bit of a misconception.**

**There is an implication that Thomas -- who wasn’t there the first time Jesus appeared, for some unknown reason that**

**the gospel writer deems it not important to tell us – that Thomas is doubting Jesus.**

**But if we take a little closer look at the story, we may be able to see otherwise.**

**The first thing Thomas does when he enters this scene is listen to the testimony of his friends. “Yeah, we all saw the Lord,” they agree. They speak to Jesus’ Resurrection.**

**But the old adage rings true. *Actions* speak louder than words.**

**What are Jesus’ disciples doing that would indicate that he is risen? John tells us they remain hidden behind locked doors, afraid that they are going to be next. Even after a week goes by, the door might not be *locked* ... but it’s still shut and no one has gone anywhere. Even after they have seen Jesus and spoken with him.**

**Thomas is at least straightforward about his unbelief. And he asks for nothing more than what the others had seen.**

**He just wants to be on equal footing with them if they indeed have had this incredible experience.**

**For when he does, we aren't told he even needs to have his demands fully met. Caravaggio's famous painting takes a little artistic license and assumes Thomas took Jesus up on his offer. But the text doesn't say whether or not Thomas touched the wound in Jesus' side. It's only certain that he saw what he needed to see.**

**And that's enough. Enough that Thomas names Jesus as God. Not just Lord, which is a bit more ambiguous. Not Messiah. Not master or rabbi. Not even Son of God. Just without any qualifiers: God.**

**Yet he isn't recalled as Proclaiming Thomas. Or Had-An-Epiphany Thomas. Or even simply Satisfied Thomas, at having the same opportunity his fellows had.**

**He's stuck with Doubting Thomas and that isn't going to change any time soon.**

**But what can change? What should change? What needs to change?**

**We are people of the Resurrection who proclaim that this changes everything.**

**Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Fabulous words ... but they will never be heard or seen or felt ... as clearly as our actions.**

**If we stay stuck ... if we stay locked away, knowing the truth of God's way, of God's power, over persecutors, over popular opinion, and over the permanence of death, and just hide that and hide ourselves until kingdom come ... well, it will be no wonder if the world ignores what we might think about the significance of Jesus and the meaning of his Resurrection. It will be nothing more than words, and like Thomas, nobody will be convinced by words alone.**

**Jesus, as John begins to tell us as a sort of epilogue, *did* more than a simple volume can contain. The miraculous**

signs of this episode are most obvious as the appearing behind closed doors and *living* with the marks of the crucifixion that killed him. But he does a couple of things that are more subtle here that might have a more last impact for his church.

First is that he gives grace. Now we know Jesus is capable of giving his disciples a hard word when it's needed but he recognizes now is not the time. These folks are traumatized. Peter has to be feeling particularly awful and expectant of rebuke for his denial three times over. He won't go down in history as Denying Peter, but *he* doesn't know that yet.

But Jesus' first words to his companions in ministry who misunderstood him, who abandoned him and who have underestimated him, are peace be with you. And then again -- after he shows them his wounds and gives them a chance to

**be astonished by it all for a moment – again, peace be with you.**

**His disciples know they have messed up but they don't know what to do and they won't figure it out for a while. But Jesus is going to love them and be gracious to them anyway. That's good news for *all* of us who follow Jesus, and mess up and don't know what to do and still can't figure out.**

**What might be even better news is what Jesus tells Thomas: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. That means all those who were first to receive this Gospel. Who lived under the persecution of the Romans and were alienated from their fellow Jews by corrupted priests. Who were a couple of generations removed from the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus ... but still held onto their belief in him when seemingly all else was lost.**

**Same goes for you and me today. Have we seen Jesus? No. Not literally. Has it been a minute? Yeah. But we have still come to believe. We are still given the gift of the Holy Spirit, still granted a new beginning in the receiving of that life-giving gift. Just as John harkened back to the beginning at the darkness of the tomb, to the deep, dark, chaotic elements from which God began to bring forth creation. So we get another making of old things new. God breathed the breath of life into Adam and Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit over his disciples.**

**And he sent them forth with that Spirit. We, too, are sent as Spirit-filled followers of Jesus into a scary world out there. We will stumble as we go on our way. But we must go. We will hear “Peace be with you,” we will experience forgiveness, we will receive mercy and grace as we make our way. But we can’t stay safe within four walls and closed off from what’s out there beyond. That’s not much of a life. And**

**Jesus means us for abundant life. As simultaneously wonderful and frightening as that sounds.**

**Now, to be fair, I know there can be extenuating circumstances. Sometimes we can't literally go out, for one reason or another. But still we can let others in. Whether it's with a call, an email, a text ... we have ways to connect to other people, to creation, even if it's no farther than our own backyard. We can give support and encouragement to others who *are* in the thick of it, who minister in our community and in nearly every corner of our world.**

**And we can always proclaim, when we have witnessed what the body of Christ is capable of ... when we believe what is still yet to come, but by faith know it will come.**

**My Lord and my God!**

**What a blessing, truly, that is.**

**Amen.**