

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

### Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### No Room for Doubt

#### Revelation 1:4-13

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.<sup>7</sup> Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,<sup>11</sup> which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."<sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,<sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.<sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.<sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.<sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Have you ever had a life-changing experience? Have you had something that has happened to you which forever changed your outlook on the world? The apostle John was blessed to have several of those types of monumental occasions happen during his lifetime. We have two of them recorded for us in our Bible readings this morning from John's gospel and his book of Revelation. Both of these events involved an appearance of the resurrected Lord Jesus to the apostle. As we look at John's life-changing experiences and see how the Lord removed his doubts and replaced them with confident faith, the Lord appears to us as well and convinces us that when it comes to our faith lives, there is no room for doubt.

Our reading this morning is a first in a series of readings from the book of Revelation that we last throughout the six weeks of the Easter season. This reading is really the introduction to the whole book and it reminds us of the circumstances under which John received this Revelation and the Lord's purpose in showing John these amazing visions. We'll pick up the reading at the ninth verse where John writes, "*I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and*

*kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*" It had been quite some time since Jesus' ascension to heaven. Much had happened in that time. The Word of the Lord had spread all around the world through the missionary efforts of the early Christians, especially through the work of the apostle Paul. Just as the number of Christians was growing on a daily basis, so also the hatred for Christians and the gospel message was growing. John tells us that he received this revelation while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos for the sake of the gospel. The Christian writer Irenaeus tells us that this exile happened near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, around 95 AD.

As John writes down these words, he lets all Christians know that he has something in common with them. He says that he shares in their sufferings. Emperor Domitian is known to have enforced emperor worship and often persecuted Christians. Many Christians were faced with the option of worshipping the emperor or being thrown in prison (or worse). This was a time of severe trial for God's people. John also said that he shared something else in common with other Christians. He said they were fellow members of God's kingdom. A kingdom is a place of power and authority. It must have been hard for those Christians to see that they were truly kings in this world when everything around them pointed to the opposite. They seemed to have no power or authority, but were under the thumb of an earthly king. This disconnect between the spiritual truth that Christ the King was in control and the reality of the suffering they faced every day could certainly lead those Christians to doubt whether God's Word was actually true. It could even lead the apostle John, who had every reason to believe the Lord's Words, to face his own doubts and uncertainties.

It wouldn't be the first time that John had known such doubts. We have to realize that Thomas was not the only one filled with doubt following Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. When Jesus appeared to the other disciples on that first Easter evening, where were they? They were together in a room with the doors locked. Why were they there? Because they were afraid. They were filled with doubts and worries about their future. They didn't realize that Jesus was alive, just as he said he would be, and that he was in control. The other disciples, John included, needed the appearance of Jesus just as much as doubting Thomas did.

What about you? Have you ever found yourself spiritually locked up in a room by doubt? It seems difficult to be talking about doubt on the Sunday right after Easter when we worshipped with such confidence and joy just seven days earlier. But we are all sinful human beings. And any one of us could be caught in the trap of doubting our Lord and his Word on any given day. You might not want to admit to the doubts that you have, but, more than likely, you are familiar with the consequences of those doubts. Spiritual doubt leads to worry and fear. We worry about our lives when we doubt the Lord's plan for us. We fear the future when we doubt the fact that the Lord Jesus is in control. We fear for our spiritual future when we doubt the reality of God's forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Thank God that he knows our doubting hearts and sees our deep spiritual need for comfort and assurance. That is the reason he appeared to John on the isle of Patmos. He came with a message for all Christians. The message was clear: do not doubt; do not be afraid; the Lord is in control and his people will triumph. Just think of what an experience it must have been for John to turn and see that vision of the Lord. Listen again to what he witnessed: "*On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,<sup>11</sup> which said: "Write on a scroll*

*what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.*"<sup>12</sup> *I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,*<sup>13</sup> *and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.*<sup>14</sup> *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.*<sup>15</sup> *His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.*<sup>16</sup> *In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

What an impressive sight! John knew that he was in the presence of the living Lord. He had seen no less an impressive sight on the mount of transfiguration when Jesus shone in all his glory before Peter, James and John. He had seen as miraculous sight when Jesus appeared on Easter Sunday, alive with the nail marks as proof of his triumph over death. John knew he was not worthy to stand in the Lord's presence and so he fell down at his feet to worship him. And then the Lord spoke. And his words to John are words that he speaks to all his followers. He says: "*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.*"<sup>18</sup> *I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*" Jesus came to remove all fear and doubt from John's heart. He came to reassure him that he was truly alive and reigning at the right hand of God the Father. Despite the suffering and persecution the church was facing, Christ still had all authority and power. He held in his hand the ultimate power—power over death. He had the key which could unlock the grave and give eternal life to his followers. His appearance to John left no room for doubt.

We might think: "That's wonderful. I wouldn't have any doubts either if I saw Jesus in a miraculous vision the way John did. But that doesn't happen for me." The truth is: we have something far better. We don't need a miraculous vision on an island to remove our doubts and fears. We have Christ by our side every day as he speaks to us in his Word. We can hear him assure us of his power and his presence as we read the Scriptures and take his Word to heart. And if that isn't enough, he has given us the sacraments as well. If you doubt your salvation, think back to the day you were baptized. Did the water splash on your head? Was the Word of God present? You are saved. You are a child of God. If you doubt the reality of forgiveness, come up to the Lord's supper. Can you taste the bread and wine? Is Christ's body and blood, given for you, truly present in this sacred meal? You don't have to doubt. You are forgiven. The Lord knows our need for reassurance and comfort and he comes to us in his Word and sacraments to fill that need. There is no room for doubt. You can live in confidence and joy, knowing that your Savior truly rose from the dead and is still with you today. He is *truly* alive. That truth gives us the spiritual confidence we need to devote our whole lives to our Savior's service. **Amen.**

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