

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Stop Doubting and Believe

John 20:19-31

^{NIV} On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

One event that brings a smile to the faces of most people sitting in the pews at church is a song by the children of our preschool. People love to see the little children come up to the front of the church and sing their song of praise. It's usually something simple, like the old classic, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Why is that people enjoy that so much. I think it is partly because people just like to see little children. But I hope that it is also because people like to see these little children singing praise to their God. It is wonderful to see the faith so evident in the joy expressed on their faces and in their voices. There is a reason Jesus praised the faith of children. It's a faith free of doubts and worries. It's simple trust in a loving Savior. That is the faith that each of us should strive to imitate. It's not always easy. In our Gospel today, we see how the disciples struggle with their faith and their doubts. We also see how Jesus provides them with that childlike faith.

Those days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday were some very trying days for Jesus' followers. There is a reason that we see them on the evening of Easter Sunday, locked in a room and huddled in fear. For the past three years, their lives were completely dedicated to one man—Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus had been betrayed, crucified and buried. They still did not understand what it all meant. They feared for their own lives. They also felt the guilt of how they had treated Jesus in his final hours. The last time most of them had seen Jesus was over their shoulders as they fled in the other direction. Peter could probably still hear the curses he had called down on himself as he denied even knowing Jesus. What would happen next? They should have known. Jesus had told

them that the Son of Man must die and then rise again. There were reports already circulating that evening that Jesus had risen from the dead. But the disciples were still filled with fear and doubts. Before long, Jesus would take those doubts away.

But not for everyone. Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared. Even when he heard the first-hand account of the disciples, he still could not believe. After the disciples told him they had seen the Lord, he protested: *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”* This is how he earned the nickname we sometimes use: doubting Thomas. But can you blame him? It is not everyday that someone comes back from the dead. It goes against everything we know from experience. When people die, they stay dead. So how could Jesus truly be alive? Maybe the other disciples were hallucinating. Maybe they had seen a strange vision, but not Jesus in the flesh. Can you blame him for doubting? Yes, you can. He should have known better. He should have taken Jesus at his word when he said, *“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and three days later, he will rise.”* He should have believed and yet he doubted.

It sounds like the way that you and I act sometimes, doesn't it? We know the promises of God. We know that we can rely on him in any and every circumstance to carry through on his promises. Yet we are prone to doubt and worry. It is hard for us to see past our experiences and our own human reason and fully rely on God. We run into a hardship in life. We know that God says all things will work out for our God. Yet we doubt. We see that our church budget is falling short. We know that God tells us he will give us all that we heap blessings upon us when we give of our first and best to the Lord. Yet we doubt. We have an opportunity to share Jesus with a friend or a neighbor. We know that God has promised to be with us and give us the words to speak in these situations. Yet we doubt.

And what is the result of doubt? It is inactivity. It is hard to live out our Christian faith when that faith is filled with doubt. We find ourselves huddled up in a locked room like those disciples on that first Easter evening. We find ourselves looking for more proof that God will keep his promises like Thomas did. And, in the end, we suffer and the mission of the church suffers from our doubts. We worry about our health and welfare instead of trusting in Jesus to work all things for our good. We hold back on the sacrificial kind of giving that we could be doing instead of truly giving to the Lord as we have been blessed. We shy away from speaking about our Savior instead boldly confessing our faith. This inactivity is a result of our doubts. There is a better way. It's a way that begins with the one who removes all doubt.

Look at how Jesus removed doubt among that group of disciples on Easter evening. We read: *“Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. He removed their doubts with his words and by his actions. The words “Peace be with you were a common greeting at that time. But when Jesus spoke them, they became much more. Think of the doubts and worries that plagued those disciples. Was Jesus truly who he said he was? Did he really rise? Would he forgive them for their shameful actions? All those questions were answered when Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” They had no reason to doubt or worry. Jesus was alive. And he brought them his peace. He showed them his hands and his side. Those wounds were his sign of victory. They were the marks that proved the world's sins had been paid in full. And what was the result of Jesus' appearance? John writes in his gospel: “They were overjoyed.”*

A week later Jesus drove away the doubts of the one disciple that hadn't been there. Thomas said that he needed to put his fingers in the nail marks and his hand in Jesus' side and that is exactly what he was able to do. Jesus gave Thomas all the proof he needed. And what was the result? Thomas exclaimed: "*My Lord and my God!*" He gave a bold confession of faith. And his confession of faith did not end there. Neither did the disciples' joy end on Easter evening. These men who had been completely convinced of the reality of Christ's resurrection become bold confessors of the gospel. God used these men to grow the Christian church from that small group gathered together in a room to hundred, then thousands, then eventually millions more. They witnessed to the truth of the resurrection because they were completely convinced that it was true.

In a similar way, Jesus comes to drive away our doubts as well. He doesn't come to us and show us the nail marks in his hands and the wound in his side. But he does come to us. How? Listen again to the last two verses of our text: "*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*³¹ *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" God has given us his Word so that we might be convinced of the truth—that we might believe. His Word is sufficient, yet God has chosen other means to drive away our doubts as well. He does this in the sacraments. The water washes away sin and creates that childlike faith. The bread and the wine give you his body and blood and offer another assurance that he loves you, that he died for you and that he will keep all his promises to you. Your God gives you his Word and sacraments for a reason...that you might know your Savior Jesus and believe in him—that you might find life in his name.

What a blessing it is to have a God so concerned about us that he wants to drive away our doubts and convince us time and time again that he is our loving Savior. He deals with us so patiently, so persistently. And as he drives away the doubts again and again the result is that childlike faith that we are looking for. The faith that proclaims: "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." It is a faith that is living and active. It trusts in Jesus to keep his promises. It is willing to give to Jesus the first and best. It is a faith that shows itself in a witness to the world. May God work that kind of faith in each and every one of us as he daily and completely washes away our sins and assures of his abiding peace. **Amen.**

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