

Easter 2 – Vicar Lehne Sermon
John 20:19–31: “Jesus Dispels Our Doubts”
4/6/24; 4/7/24 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O risen Christ, who said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”: Mercifully grant that this benediction may be ours; so that, walking by faith and not by sight, we may evermore rejoice in You, and confess You as our Savior, our Lord, and our God. Amen (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 86).

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

²⁷ [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who dispels our every doubt, dear fellow redeemed:

How could Thomas be so stubborn? The other disciples saw Jesus with their own eyes. They saw the mark of the nails on his hands and the hole in his side from the spear. Why did Thomas refuse to believe his fellow disciples “[u]nless [he saw] in [Jesus’] hands the mark of the nails, and [placed his] finger into the mark of the nails, and [placed his] hand into [Jesus’] side” (verse 25)? What reason did he have to not believe the men whom he had traveled with for so long and gotten to know so well? But even though Thomas was wrong to doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead, the other disciples were no better.

The first people to hear the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead were the women who went to anoint Jesus’ body early in the morning after the Sabbath had ended. When they arrived at the tomb, they discovered that the stone, which blocked the entrance to the tomb, had been rolled away. Inside the tomb, Jesus’ body was gone, which perplexed the women. Then, two angels appeared to them and said, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:5–7). Then the women remembered Jesus’ words and went to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. The women were told to tell them these things not only by the angels, but also by Jesus himself, who appeared to them as they returned from the tomb.

What good news the women gave the disciples! Jesus, who had been betrayed by one of their own and arrested, who had died on the cross, as witnessed by John, and who had been placed in a tomb, the entrance to which was blocked by a large stone, was not dead, but alive! He had

accomplished the work that he had come to do. He had paid the price for the world's sins on the cross and declared his victory over sin, death, and the devil by his rising from the dead. The disciples should have been rejoicing when they heard the report of the women. But, when the women told these things to the disciples, "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:11).

The disciples had no reason to think that the women were just telling them an idle tale and that Jesus hadn't actually risen from the dead. He had told them many times what was going to happen to him. We hear in the gospel according to St. Matthew that, after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, "[f]rom that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matthew 16:21). He predicted his death and resurrection to his disciples two more times after that. Then, shortly before he was to be handed over to the religious authorities and arrested, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified" (Matthew 26:2). And finally, on the night that he was to be arrested and sentenced to death, Jesus said to his disciples, "[A]fter I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:32).

When the disciples heard the report of the women, they should have remembered Jesus' words and believed that he had risen from the dead, just like the women did. But instead, they doubted. It took Jesus appearing before the disciples and showing them the mark of the nails on his hands and the hole in his side from the spear for them to believe. The words that Jesus spoke to Thomas in our text for today may as well have been spoken to all of the disciples: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (verse 29).

You are "those who have not seen and yet have believed." It was two thousand years ago that Jesus walked the earth. There's no way that any of you could have seen him. All you have are the words that the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples and the other writers of the Bible to write down. Those words tell you that you are by nature sinful and that you deserve only God's wrath and punishment. They tell you that there is no way for you to escape God's wrath and punishment or to earn your way into heaven. But those words also tell you that God the Father loved you so much that he didn't want to leave you to that dreadful fate. So, he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to take all of your sin on himself and experience all of the wrath and punishment from God that you rightfully deserved. The mark of the nails on his hands and the hole in his side from the spear is proof of Jesus' love for you. Jesus was nailed to the cross for you. His side was pierced for you. His death on the cross was so that you would not have to experience that death.

But what God tells us through his Word doesn't end with Jesus' death, because if Jesus had remained dead, then you would have no hope. As the apostle Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, "[I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). If Jesus had not been raised, then that would mean that his sacrifice was not sufficient enough to pay for your sins. The good news is that Jesus has been raised from the dead, which means that his sacrifice was sufficient and that your sins have been paid for and forgiven. You have heard the same words that the disciples heard. The disciples were not willing to believe this good news without seeing evidence that Jesus truly had risen. Even

though you have not seen any evidence that Jesus has risen, it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that you believe that it's true.

Does that make you better or more faithful than the disciples? Even though we don't doubt that Jesus has died on the cross and risen from the dead, there are other things that God has revealed to us through his Word that we do doubt. God tells us that he will be with us in times of trouble, but how do we know for sure that he is with us during those times? After all, it is often during our times of trouble that we feel the most alone. God also tells us that he loves us and will always do what is best for us, but how do we know that this is true? After all, so many others seem to have it better than we do, and not just other Christians, but unbelievers. If unbelievers seem to have it better than we do, how do we know for sure that he loves us and is doing what is best for us? And even though we believe that Jesus truly did die on the cross for the sins of the world, how do we know for sure that Jesus died for our sins? After all, the sins that we have done are so horrible, and they continue to weigh us down. If Jesus really did die for our sins, why do we continue to feel so guilty? What if that means that our sins haven't actually been forgiven because they are just too great? In all of these instances, as well as many others, our doubts can lead us to not trust in the words that God has spoken to us through Scripture alone. Our doubts can lead us to seek evidence from God that what he has told us is true. In moments like these, we are no better than the disciples, who needed to see the risen Jesus to believe that he had truly risen from the dead.

Whenever we have doubts about what God has revealed to us in his Word and shut the doors of our hearts to him, Jesus passes through the shut doors of our hearts and says to us, "Peace be with you" (verses 19, 26). Jesus brings his peace to us through the means of grace, his Word and Sacraments, and through Holy Absolution. Whenever we doubt that God loves us or that he is with us in times of trouble, Jesus dispels our doubts by pointing us to the promises that he made to us in his Word and saying, "I do love you and will always be with you." Whenever we doubt that we have been forgiven, Jesus comforts and strengthens us by pointing us to our baptisms and saying, "I have washed away your sins." Whenever we are burdened with guilt, Jesus leads us to his table to give us his true body and blood in the bread and the wine and says to us, "I forgive you all your sins." And in Holy Absolution, he uses his called servants of the Word to announce to all of us, "By the authority of Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is not through evidence that our hearts are put at peace. It is Jesus, working through the Word, Sacraments, and Absolution, that puts our hearts at peace.

While it would certainly be amazing to have evidence from God presented to us that what he was revealed to us through his Word is true, we don't need it, because we already have the eyewitness accounts from the apostles about what Jesus did. Even though those apostles thought that they needed to see proof of Jesus' resurrection before they could believe, they now tell us to believe without getting any further proof. As the apostle John writes in our text for today, "[T]hese have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that by believing, you may have life in his name" (verse 31). God's Word is enough. It is through God's Word that we know why we need a Savior. It is through God's Word that we know what our Savior has done to save us. It is through God's Word that we know that the victory has been won for us by our Savior. Whenever we have doubts, we don't demand that God give us new evidence that what he says is true. We turn to his Word and hear

of his great love for us, love that led our Savior, Jesus, to lay down his own life for us, and to hear of the comfort and hope that Jesus used to dispel our doubts, comfort and hope that we have through Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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