

Text: John 20:19-31

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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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." 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!" 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." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.

Prayer of the Day:

O risen Lord, you came to your disciples and took away their fears with your word of peace. Come to us also by Word and Sacrament, and banish our fears with the comforting assurance of your abiding presence; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Alleluia. (John 20:29b)

Sermon Text:

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, ⁵ 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, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ who has indeed risen from death! Alleluia!! This weekend we continue the celebration begun in earnest last weekend. Alleluias continue to ring within worship whether in or outside of our building. We are Blessed! This weekend the celebration amplifies because not only do we have the opportunity to continue to rejoice in the resurrection but we have the rare opportunity to rejoice with 15 young men and women who make public declaration of the faith given in baptism and invite them to partake of the Lord's Supper with us next weekend to receive the body and blood of Christ Himself in with and under, bread, and wine that they might receive all that body and blood have done for them: forgiveness, new life, salvation every time they receive it. We really are Blessed!

But one wonders if we are always so very eager to see it. Yeah, Easter was joyous, a blessing to gather together but have you noticed that more and more our world seems only to remember Jesus at Christmas and Easter (if then even) and seems to forget about Him just as quickly. Grab one of those essay packets in the back on the way out today. Our confirmands did a nice job as always. Anna Suprenand wrote about the 3rd Commandment and why time, regular time, spent with God is so essential, especially in a world that increasingly seems to lack rest. Have we forgotten about the treasures that are regularly on display here in worship? 15 young men and women will promise to make regular use of the means of grace and forsake everything else, even life itself, rather than fall away from the truths they have learned, wrote about in here. Every year it's the same, track record isn't great not just for St. Paul's mind you but for all of Christendom

these days. Numbers, if they matter as a marker of success, are shrinking. Are we keeping our promises? We are blessed? Sometimes it is hard to see, isn't it?

The disciples are right there with us in the words of our lesson today. Locked behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Still? Even after Easter morning, the news from the women, the reports from Peter and John. The appearances of Jesus which had been occurring and no doubt reported.

Sometimes it's hard to see the blessings God is pouring out, so He stands right in front of them. Jesus appears and the words are dripping with comfort and grace, *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* He breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* Peace!! Peace between fallen mankind and a holy God. Peace even though the enemies of Christ are frothing at the mouth and spewing lies about the resurrection in an attempt to cover up the truth. Peace even though they would be persecuted and oppressed. Because of the first peace, nothing else mattered, nothing else could take away that forgiveness, purchased and won by Jesus himself, who had done it all for them. So receive the Holy Spirit, through the Living Word standing in front of them breathing Him out upon them and get out there with this news. Get out there with this message of the Scriptures which you have actually lived and breathed for the last three years, of which you are eyewitnesses.

Thomas wasn't there and maybe he was from Missouri, their unofficial motto is the "show-me" state. Anyway, He won't believe it unless he sees it, touches Him, experiences it with his own eyes and senses. God is gracious! Thomas doesn't melt into oblivion on the spot for his doubt but a week later (interesting that God makes him wait for a bit) Jesus appears again. Thomas "Touch me, experience the resurrection, stop doubting believe!" Blessed! *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

I'll admit it. There is a touch of Thomas in me. Lord, I know the church is militant while here in this world. It'll struggle as it holds out Your name. I know there will be losses. I know the end goal is to march to the triumphant gates of heaven through death or your glorious return. But it's hard to always see the victory in it. It's hard to always experience the joy of knowing my eternity is secure. It's hard especially in the face of trouble or trial, especially hard when death hits way too close to home. When the body is racked with pain, or the soul is anguishing over some unseen unknown hurt. Blessed? Sometimes, I feel cursed.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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. Oh, God has me in these words too, has you in them as well. Mary saw Him, heard Him, and cried out, *Rabboni, which means teacher* (John 20:16). Ten of the Apostles saw Him and were overjoyed. Thomas doubted but in so doing provides even more proof of the resurrection for us all. Disciples on the road to Emmaus, the women as they returned from the tomb, the Apostles by the sea, an appearance to over 500, the Ascension accounts, the Conversion of Paul, it's all for you. It's all for me that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, our risen and ascended Lord, who has conquered sin, death, satan, and hell for us. That through God's gracious gift of faith we might believe that there is more than a messed up world assaulted by sin. That through Christ, we might be blessed!

Yes in God's living and enduring Word, through the sacraments which it is connected to, God comes to you individually and presents His overwhelming proof. Through that Word, the Spirit of our God wafts through the air and into our hearts, granting, strengthening, protecting the faith He alone can give. There He would even ask you to rush out into a world that can often be anything but forgiving and hold out His forgiveness that all might know His peace, that all might be blessed!

Oh, at times, it might be hard to see it. At times, we may even doubt it. The devil, the world, our own sinful flesh will work hard to pull us away from the truth. But truth is unchanging. And the resurrection promises we are **BLESSED! BECAUSE OF THE FACTS SET BEFORE US. BECAUSE OF THE FAITH THAT LIVES WITHIN US.** Last week, we reveled in the joy of it all, a truth which has stood the test of time for almost 2000 years. Today 15 young men and women will make their promises. They will join countless others who have gone before. By grace, through faith, the forgiveness we so desperately need, a new life to live before our God in this world with real purpose, the joy of salvation which can carry us through trial and tempest knowing that we will one day see it, experience it all in heaven. **BLESSED!** That pretty much sums it up. Amen!