



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Living Hope."
(Easter, 2026)
"Hope and Doubt." *John 20.19-31*.

□ **Day #1—Monday, April 13th. Read: John 20.19-23. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

This week we will explore the days following the resurrection of Jesus and how the disciples were impacted by this cataclysmic event—particularly Thomas. We will also hear from Martin Luther as he comments on the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

There were at least five Resurrection appearances of our Lord on that first Easter day; Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (*John 20.11–18*), the other women (*Matthew 28.8–10*), Peter (*1 Corinthians 15.5 and Luke 24.34*), the two Emmaus disciples (*Luke 24.13–32*), and the disciples minus Thomas (*John 20.19–25*). The next Sunday, the disciples met again and Thomas was with them (*John 20.26–31*). Clearly, it was already becoming the habit of the disciples to meet together on Sundays. It would be on this day, Sunday, that would come to be called "the Lord's Day" (*Revelation 1.10*).

In the days to come, the church would meet and worship on Sunday, which, in the ancient world, was the first day of the week. On this day, the believers would hear the Scriptures, pray, and "break bread," commemorating Jesus' death and resurrection (*Acts 20.7; 1 Corinthians 16.1–2*). Sunday would become the Christian *Sabbath*. The change in observing the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day was not the result of some ecclesial decree; rather, it was the natural consequences of a community that had seen the risen Jesus and knew that, because He defeated death, Jesus is God! God's future "new day" had arrived through the death and resurrection of Jesus!

In this text, we witness the rapid switch of emotion from fear (*v.19*) to joy (*v.20*). The reason was the declaration of peace from the risen Lord Jesus. The words *Peace be with you* are in the form of an ordinary greeting, but on the lips of Jesus they convey the bestowal of His own peace to His disciples as previously promised (*John 14.27; John 16.33*). There is significance in the showing of Jesus' hands and side to the disciples because there could then have been no doubt about the identity of Jesus. Even His risen body carried such proofs. The repetition of the gift of peace gives added emphasis to its importance, especially as it is linked with a specific commission (see *v.21*). The implication of these words is that the sending of His disciples (us) was to fulfill the commission which Jesus had received from the Father. As Jesus was sent to the world to bring salvation to all, Jesus will now send the church (you and me) to continue this divine mission.

We must note in the first place that Christ by his suffering not only saved us from the devil, death, and sin, but also that his suffering is an example, which we are to follow in our suffering...For God has appointed that we should not only believe in the crucified Christ, but also be crucified with him, as he clearly shows...in the Gospels: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matt. 10:25).¹

Question/Reflect: Why do you think the disciples are fearful now? What fears, doubts, or questions about God are you struggling with? Pray about those this week as you study.

¹ Martin Luther, "Sermon on Cross and Suffering," *Luther's Works*: 51, 198-99.

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, April 14th. Read (Again): John 20.19-23; Romans 4.25. —Examine: The Text and its**

Why was Thomas not with the other disciples when they met on the evening of Easter? Was he so disappointed that he did not want to be with the other disciples, his friends? It is sad, but usually true, that when we go through difficult times in our lives, we cut-off from the very Christian community that we need the most! Solitude only feeds discouragement and helps it grow into self-pity, which is even more self-defeating. Because Thomas was not there, he missed seeing Jesus Christ, hearing His words of peace, and receiving His commission and gift of spiritual life. He had to endure a week of fear and doubt when he could have been experiencing joy and peace! Remember Thomas when you are tempted to stay home from church.☺ You never know what special blessings you might miss! Notice, John mentions both the Aramaic and Greek names of Thomas, although he has referred to this disciple previously.

Thomas' emphatic disbelief of the testimony of the other disciples intensified his doubts and questions about the true person and nature of Jesus (v.28). Thomas wanted physical evidence, which would convince him that the risen Christ was the very Jesus he had known. Of course, he has been labeled "Doubting Thomas," but Jesus did not rebuke him for his doubts. Jesus rebuked him for unbelief. Unbelief is very different from doubting. Doubt is often an intellectual problem: we want to believe, but we are often overwhelmed by problems and/or questions. Unbelief is a *refusal* to believe—no matter what!

The giving of the Spirit here was linked with the forgiving of sins (v.23). The promise was given here to the whole group of disciples (the verb is plural). Although it is not in human power to forgive sins, the preaching of the gospel proclaims such forgiveness. The verbs are in the passive tense which points to God as the active subject. Those who do not respond to the preaching of the gospel are left in their sins (Greek: "are retained," which the ESV translates as "withheld"). With this promise see also *Matthew 16.18-19; Matthew 18.18-19*.

Now we come to the resurrection of Christ, to the day of Easter. After a person has contemplated the passion and cross of Christ and has thus become aware of his sin and is terrified in his heart, he must watch that sin does not remain in his conscience...But if you behold your sin resting on Christ and see it overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified...²

Question/Reflect: How does Thomas' personality compare to the other disciples' (vs. 9, 19)? How does Jesus deal with Thomas' doubt (v. 29)?

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, April 15th. Read: John 20.24-28. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

What was it that Thomas would not believe? It was the reports from the other disciples that Jesus was alive. The Greek verb tense in *John 20.25*, which is translated "told... him," means that the disciples *kept on saying to him...* In other words, they were so excited about seeing Jesus they could stop talking about it! What Thomas wants is personal experience. On the one hand, that is ok. While we have all heard about Jesus from others (parents, family members, friends, pastors, teachers) we ultimately must choose for ourselves to follow Jesus. While Thomas missed out on what would have been a week of joy and peace (see above), at least he showed up the next week. The other ten disciples likely had told Thomas that when Jesus appeared, Jesus had shown them his hands and side (*John 20.20*). Consequently, Thomas made that the test for him, "show me your hands and side!"

Thomas' demands in v.25b are worded graphically, and the demand for concrete evidence is heightened by his insistence on touching Jesus' hands and side, but in essence what he demands as the conditions of his belief, tangible proof of the resurrection, is what Jesus himself gave the disciples in v. 20...³

The precise repetition of Thomas's words must have made a deep impression on the man. While Jesus was showing sympathy for Thomas because of his doubts, there is no indication that Thomas actually touched the wounds (v.27). The confession "My Lord and my God" is remarkable for its theological grasp. Whether or not Thomas fully understood his own words, this unmistakably high conception of the divine nature provides a fitting conclusion to John's record of the path of faith. Nevertheless, the weakness of Thomas's confession was that it depended on sight. Jesus needed to make a correction here by mentioning the greater blessedness of those who believe without sight, which applies to all Christian believers ever since the time of Jesus. However, while we do not physically see Jesus, we depend upon secure evidence (i.e. Scripture, the witness of the church through the ages, and theological traditions).

2 Martin Luther, "A Meditation on Christ's Passion." *Luther's Works*: 42, 12.

3 Gail R. O'Day. "The Gospel of John," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

Behold Jesus Christ, the King of glory, rising from the dead. Here the heart can find its supreme joy and lasting possessions. Here there is not the slightest trace of evil, for “Christ being risen from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer has dominion over him”...He has destroyed sin and raised up righteousness, abolished death and restored life, conquered hell and bestowed everlasting glory on us.⁴

Question/Reflect: When you have struggles in your faith, what have you found helpful to get you through these struggles? What do you think would help you? Pray about this today.

☐ **Day #4--Thursday, April 16th. Read: John 20.27-29.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

John 20.29 indicates that Thomas' testimony did not come from his *touching* Jesus, but from his *seeing* Jesus. “My Lord and my God!” is the last of the testimonies that John records to the deity of Jesus Christ. The others are from: John the Baptist (*John 1.34*); Nathanael (*John 1.49*); Jesus Himself (*John 5.25; 10.36*); Peter (*John 6.69*); the healed blind man (*John 9.35-38*); Martha (*John 11.27*); and, of course, John himself (*John 20.30-31*).

It is an awesome thing that Jesus had a personal interest in and concern for Thomas. Jesus wanted to strengthen his faith and include him in the blessings that lay in store for His followers. Jesus' words in *v. 27b* translate literally, “Stop becoming faithless but become a believer.” We need to remind ourselves that everybody lives by faith. The difference is in the *object* of that faith. For Christians, we put faith in God and His Word; for others, their faith will be placed in something else.

You must not judge by external appearances. You must be guided by the word, which promises and gives you everlasting life. Then you truly have eternal life...Go ahead and die in God's name. You are still assured of eternal life; it will surely be yours. To die, to be buried, to have people tread on your grave, to be consumed by worms—all this will not matter to you. It is certain that Christ will raise you up again. For here you have his promise: “I will raise you up.”⁵

Question/Reflect: Our hope is that Jesus is Lord and God, not just another religious teacher and leader. Only God has the power over life and death!

☐ **Day #5—Friday, April 17th. Read: John 20:29-31.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

John could not end his book without bringing the Resurrection miracle to his future readers (you and me). While we often look at Thomas and the other disciples and wish we could have walked with Jesus, John reminds us that because of the resurrection, people in *every* age could and can know that Jesus is God and that faith in Him brings everlasting life. It is not necessary to “see” Jesus Christ in order to believe. Yes, it was a blessing for the early Christians to see our Lord and know that He was alive; but that is not what saved them. They were saved, not by seeing, but by *believing*.

The emphasis throughout the Gospel of John is on *believing*. There are nearly 100 references in John citing “believing on Jesus Christ.” While you and I today cannot see Jesus, the eye-witnesses to Jesus, John the other Gospel writers, as well as Paul himself, did see Jesus and recorded their experiences with Jesus for all future believers to hear (and read)! As Paul reminds us: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (*Romans 10.17*). As you read John's witness, you come face to face with Jesus Christ; how He lived, what He taught, and what He did. All of the evidence points to the conclusion that He is indeed God come in the flesh, the Savior of the world, and loves you with an everlasting love!

John explained His purpose in writing his Gospel: that people might believe in Jesus and receive eternal life! Even Jesus' miracles in John were meant to offer proof that Jesus is God! In John, the word, “miracle,” is translated from the Greek word, “*semeia*” meaning “signs.” Signs point beyond themselves to a deeper truth. In addition to the miracles recorded in his Gospel, John indicated that Jesus performed many other “miraculous signs...” In fact, 35 different miracles are recorded in the four Gospels. Again, John points out that his purpose in describing the miracles was not simply to portray Jesus as a “wonder-working messiah,” rather, John's wanted the “signs” (miracles) to point to Jesus so that his readers would “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (*v.31*).

Thus the weak should be buoyed up with these words; do you not think that he will live up to what he has said? Thus Christ gives the consolation in Luke 12:32: “Fear not, O little flock”...Thus he says in John 14:1-2: “Let not your heart be troubled.” In my Father's house, do not doubt. Eternal life is promised to you. It is a grand thing, but do not fear.⁶

4 Martin Luther, “Fourteen Consolations.” *Luther's Works: 42, 163-64.*

5 Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of John.” *Luther's Works: 23, 131.*

6 Martin Luther, “Lectures on Titus.” *Luther's Works: 29, 11-12.*

Question/Reflect: Where could you use *Jesus' peace* right now? In a relationship? In some inner fear or anxiety? Why do you think Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed?"

□ **Day #6-Saturday, April 18th. Read: John 20:30-31.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.** Many scholars believe that the "signs" that John recorded and described in his Gospel are proof of the deity of Jesus. Again, as "signs," they point beyond themselves to the person of Jesus Christ. Human beings are not saved by *believing in miracles*; they are saved by *believing in Jesus Christ*. Great crowds followed Jesus because of His miracles (*John 6.2*); but in the end, most of them left Him and never came back (*John 6.66*). Even the religious leaders who plotted His death believed that He did miracles, but this "faith" did not save them (*John 11.47ff*).

Reading about, and believing in, Jesus' miracles, the "signs," should lead to us to faith in Jesus. Jesus Himself pointed out that faith in His works (miracles) was but the *first step* toward faith in the Word of God (*John 5.36-40*). There was no need for John to tell every story about Jesus or describe every miracle that Jesus performed; in fact, John supposed that a complete record could never be written (*John 21.25*).

What was/is necessary to know and believe is there in the Word of God—the Bible! What the Gospel of John is about, and what John is concerned to reveal, is the truth that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." In John's Gospel, John presents the "3 'W's'" of Jesus: Jesus' *works*, Jesus' *walk*, and Jesus' *words*. Jesus performs *works* no one else could do, *walked* a path of obedience to God; and He spoke *words* that nobody else could speak. As C.S. Lewis was quoted as saying: "Either Jesus was a liar, lunatic, or he was Lord." In the Bible, those who believed Jesus was Lord had their lives transformed forever! The same is true today. Jesus claimed to be God come in the flesh, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Easter confirmed the authority of Jesus Christ. What do you believe?

What is it that he has wrought by his resurrection?...I am a sinner, but I am borne by his righteousness, which is given to me. I am unclean, but his holiness is my sanctification, in which I ride gently. I am an ignorant fool, but his wisdom carries me forward. I deserve condemnation, but I am set free by his redemption.⁷

Question/Reflect: As you consider John's purpose for writing his gospel (*vs. 20.30-31, 21.24-25*), how has this Gospel story changed your life? What is Jesus changing (or needs to change) now?

⁷ Martin Luther, "Fourteen Consolations." *Luther's Works*: 42, 163-64.