

Jesus Came Among Them
John 20:19-31
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
April 23, 2017 – Second Sunday of Easter

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. On that first Easter evening, we find ten of our Lord's disciples hiding themselves away in a room because of fear that the Jews would persecute and kill them just as they had Jesus. Only ten of the disciples were there because Judas in his despondency had committed suicide, and Thomas – for reasons Scripture doesn't disclose – wasn't with them. So there they were, shaking in their boots, hidden away in what they thought was a safe hiding place, when suddenly our Lord Christ appeared out of nowhere showing them His hands and His side. He didn't unlock a door or climb in through a window. Having cast aside His fleshly body, he had received a glorified body, and so He just appeared there in their midst. Naturally they were frightened – probably expecting a well-deserved rebuke for their cowardice. But that isn't what happened. Instead Jesus brought them that peace which the world cannot give – that same peace you also receive, by the way, in the Divine Service, when God's Word and forgiveness are spoken into your ears.

Now these disciples could truly be at peace, for their Lord was again amongst them with His forgiveness. But not all the Disciples were able to rejoice, for Thomas was not with them. And later, when he returned and was told that they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe. Now Thomas is often called "Doubting Thomas," but that isn't entirely true, because Thomas didn't just doubt, he steadfastly refused to believe. He told the others that unless **he** could see **with his own eyes** and feel **with his own hands** the nail marks on Jesus' body, he would **never** believe. Call me crazy, but that sounds like rank unbelief to me. So, seven days later when Jesus again appeared to His disciples Thomas was there. Jesus bestowed on them His

peace, then walked up to Thomas, looked him squarely in the eye and said: "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands. Put your hand into My side. Do not **disbelieve**, but **believe**."

As the Scriptures clearly teach, to be a follower of Jesus, you have to believe He rose from the dead, and if you deny the Resurrection you are actually denying the Resurrected One Himself. Those who claim to be Christian, yet refuse to believe in Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead are hypocrites, imposters and fools, and their so-called Christian faith is nothing more than a sham. That's why Jesus said what He said to Thomas, because He didn't want him – nor does He want any of us – to remain in unbelief. And while Holy Scripture doesn't reveal whether Thomas actually did what Jesus asked him to do, it does tell us what happened next. Thomas answered Him, saying: "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus then replied: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have **not** seen and yet have believed." That's not to suggest Thomas wasn't blessed in his believing. He was. But how many after Thomas would be able to see what He had seen? Very few – and certainly none of us! That's why St. Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Corinthians that "we walk by faith, not by sight . . . we don't look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." In other words Holy Scripture teaches the exact opposite of what the world would have us believe. We live in an age of skepticism and cynicism. We really think that "seeing is believing." If **we** can't see it for ourselves, we tend not to believe it. And even when we actually do see something, we aren't always ready to believe it.

The author of Ecclesiastes also lived in a time of cynicism. Reflecting the spirit of his day he wrote: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun." Are there times when **you** refuse to believe God loves you, cares about you, or wants to be here for you? Be honest. When you see the kinds of things that are happening in our own country, in North Korea, Syria and in so many other trouble spots around the world, don't you sometimes wonder why God doesn't do **something** to stop all this suffering, chaos and anarchy amongst the people of our world? We forget that although suffering is never God's will, He does – for reasons He has not revealed – sometimes allow it.

Now no doubt you've heard plenty of preaching about how much God loves you. And because you think you have that part down pat, doesn't it lead you to believe that perhaps you'd like to hear something different every now and then? Indeed, there are many preachers – feeling their sermons no longer have the pizzazz they once had – who think they need to preach something new and different to catch their hearers' attention. You've probably had similar thoughts yourself – some of you have even shared those thoughts with me. When you hear for the umpteenth time that Christ has risen from the dead, haven't you ever thought, "Big deal?" Or when you've heard me say Jesus is with you right now to give you His gifts, haven't you thought, "So what?" – and wanted to hear something new? Dear friends, it **is** a big deal that Christ has risen from the dead, and that He's with you right now to give you gifts – for without Christ's resurrection and gifts there would be no point for you to be here at all. Indeed, if Christ isn't risen, we're all headed for hell, there's no reason to believe any of this, and we certainly have no reason to be here.

But you are here aren't you? You're here to celebrate our Lord's crucifixion and resurrec-

tion. For it's in Christ's birth, life, suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection, that our Savior once and for all time – and for all mankind – conquered sin, death, and the devil. He overcame Thomas' unbelief, forgave the disciples, won for you the forgiveness of your sins, earned a place for you in heaven, and brought you God's peace. He sent you His Holy Spirit who calls you by the Gospel – which, as John reminds us, was "written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name." As we will all together confess in just a few moments, there is salvation in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Here in His Church is where our Lord Christ comes to us in His Word, in Baptism, in Absolution, and in His Holy Supper to save. And here is where He wants you to be.

In and by these plain, ordinary, simple means the Holy Spirit enables you to exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" This same Holy Spirit gives you the eyes of faith so that you might behold here our risen Lord and King as He comes among us again in His Word, His body, and His blood. On that Second Sunday of Easter so many long years ago, the Holy Spirit also came upon Thomas so that he might no longer live in unbelief, but trust that our Lord has risen from the dead. And now that very same Holy Spirit has come to you so that as Christ's dear child you might also live your life in Easter triumph and joy – a joy which will be yours forever. Christ **has** risen and **has** come to bring you forgiveness, life, and peace – that peace which the world cannot give. Dear Christian, Christ **is** risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.