

APRIL 7, 2024 – DOUBTING THOMAS

Our gospel today comes from John 20: 19-31. Today we find ourselves in the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John. And we're coming off last week's empty tomb. First discovered by Mary of Magdala, who runs to tell Peter and John saying, "They have taken our Lord, and we don't know where they have put him," seeming to suggest that the body had indeed been stolen.

A foot race would follow whom John, who is the presumed author of our gospel today, goes out of his way to let everybody know that he in fact won. And as they arrive at the tomb, they find what can only be described as a crime scene, something you would see on "CSI." You have the burial cloths folded up neatly in one area, and then the head covering rolled up separately in another area. Just one of ten reasons we talked about last week why we can say with confidence, "He has risen, Hallelujah. Hallelujah."

Who in their right mind would ever take the time to unwrap a body that you're trying to steal? And of course, the answer to that question is nobody. Why? Because he has risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. So, the tomb is empty. What do they do? Do they go dance in the streets? No. Do they go out into the world to witness this great miracle? No. Do they go to the religious leadership and say, "Well, I told you so"?

No, no, they didn't do that. What did they do? They hid. For fear of the Jews. And of course, you know, they had reasons to be afraid. Stealing a corpse was a capital offense under Roman law, punishable by death. And they're obviously the main suspects. They had just seen their leader, their teacher, the one they had pinned all their hopes, dreams, and desires, the one they were convinced was a messiah nailed to a cross, to suffer an agonizing death. And all those dreams, hopes, and desires died with him. And now they're thinking, "Well, we're next." So, they scatter, and they hide. Only the beloved disciple, again, the presumed author of our gospel today, only he was at the cross, along with the three Marys, his mother, his aunt, and Mary of Magdala. The rest, gone, abandoned.

Now it's been three days and Peter and John are confronted with an empty tomb. And then comes the testimony of Mary of Magdala, which they clearly do not believe. She claims to have seen the risen Jesus, although at first, she thought He was the gardener because there seems to be something about the resurrected body of Jesus that was different.

Remember the guys on the road to Emmaus? I love that gospel. Remember those guys? Remember their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. Why? Because again, like I said, there's something about the resurrected body of Jesus that's different.

But anyway, getting back to Mary, they don't believe her. They wrote it off as the crazy rantings of a grief-stricken woman. And now they're in downtown Jerusalem and they are hiding behind locked doors. On the evening of the first day of the week when the doors were locked, where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Now, this is amazing on so many levels, beginning with what he didn't say. Because I just have to tell you, if I had been crucified and died on a cross and all my friends had run away, I don't think that I would've been so charitable the next time I caught up with them. But such is the patience of our Lord with us. He appears, first thing he says, "Peace be with you." It's the first thing out of his mouth, "Peace be with you." This is a Hebrew greeting shalom, which means a whole lot more than, "Hey, how are you doing," okay. It's a whole lot more, it literally means how is your peace. But syntactically, the way it's used here, slightly different. And it's more like peace is with you because of course, peace I leave you. Peace, I give you, not as the world gives you. So, do not let your hearts be troubled. In other words, do not be afraid. This is a theme that we will see Jesus bring up time and time again. Do not be afraid over and over again. In fact, did you know, and I found this very interesting, that it says some version of do not fear, do not be terrified, do not be afraid. It says that more in the New Testament than it says to love. So obviously this is very important to our Lord. In fact, he says, peace be with you three times.

Three times, in this one gospel. You know, when the Lord says something to you, we best pay attention. It's important. But if he says it two times, well then, it's twice as important. But three times, three times? I can't think of another gospel where he says anything three times. And the same guy. Well, okay, there's that one time on the beach when he asked Peter, do you allow me three times as he was unwinding the three denials? Okay, but outside of that, I can't think of any other place where he says anything three times. But he says peace be with you three times in this one gospel. But do we get it? No, not really. We are such a fearful people.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Today we are going to talk about five things that Jesus gives his disciples, which, by the way, are you and me, right?

Five things.

Beginning with assurance.

By showing them his hands and his side, he is assuring them that indeed it is truly him.

I'm not a ghost, I'm real. I'm here with you, right here, right now. So, that's **number one**.

He gives us assurance. I've got this. I'm with you.

The second thing that Jesus gives us is peace.

As I said, three times, peace be with you. It is me.

I'm with you. You're not alone. My peace is in you.

So that's **number two**.

Do not be afraid. We seem to be having a hard time with that one. But anyway, this is the second thing that he brings us. Now, the **third** thing that he

brings us is mission. As the Father has sent me, so I send you, so we have a mission. And what is our

mission? Well, our mission is to bring people to

Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is not Confucius

trying to teach us how to be good people.

Jesus is not a teacher of ethics. He's not Alexander

the Great as he is conquering land. He's not trying

to take over. Jesus is our Savior. He came to save

us, from who? Ourselves.

And we are on a mission to spread that message.

That's the **third** thing.

Number one, assurance. Number two, peace.

Number three, mission.

Now, number **four**. When he had said this, He

breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy

Spirit." Have you ever heard the phrase, born

again? Are you born again?

No one can enter the kingdom of God until he is

born from above. That's the same thing, born

again. This is what that looks like.

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy

Spirit." They're born again, but we weren't there.

So how do we get this? If you love me, you will

keep my commandments and I'll ask the Father,

and He will give you another advocate to be with

you always.

And that same spirit is the same spirit that hovered over the deep in Genesis. It's the spirit that spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament.

It's the same spirit that descended in the form of a dove on the banks of the Jordan.

It's the same spirit, my friend, which is available to you today. He is with you and he'll be in you.

Jesus breathed on them, said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Greek word used here is *emphuseo*,

*emphuseo*.

It's where we get the word emphysema. It's

breathe. It's the only place we see this word,

emphuseo. I'm not a Greek scholar, but it's the only

time we see this word in the New Testament.

But we do see it in the Old Testament in the second

chapter of Genesis. As God breathes the breath of

life into the nostrils of Adam and enlivens him to

become a living being. So, this is the spirit that he is

giving.

So, number one, he gives us assurance.

Number two, he gives us peace.

Number three, he gives us mission.

And number four, he breathes on us the breath of

life, the life that we lost in the garden.

Do you remember when God said, "If you eat of that

fruit, you'll die." Well, they did, but did they die?

Well, of course they didn't die. Because if they

died, we wouldn't be here. But something died.

What died? The Spirit died. *Pneuma* died.

Jesus came back to revive. And you and I, what

died in us that day.

Now number **five**.

"Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and

whose sins you retain are retained."

Ooh boy. Oceans of ink have been spilled on this

one verse. The body of Christ has been fractured.

There are forty thousand plus denominations in our

country alone. And may I suggest that this

particular verse serves as a major fault line for that

division.

I offer absolution after we say a prayer of

confession at worship. But understand this, I in of

myself, can't absolve anybody from anything.

Only God can do that. But let me tell you about my

mission. Let me tell you about a man named Jesus

who died for your sins and three days later defeated

death, which is the punishment of sin when he

walked out of that tomb. He is offering you his

forgiveness today, eternal life and forgiveness.

But here's the catch, you have to receive it just as if

I were to throw you a ball today. You have to reach

out your arms and catch the ball. One cannot be

forgiven until they become willing to be forgiven.

One cannot be saved until they understand they're

in need of saving. What Jesus is simply saying is

this, if you bring the good news to somebody and

they really hear and they repent, their sins are forgiven. Period.

And if you bring the same good news to somebody and they reject it with some babble about evolution or why the scripture's bunch of lies written by a man trying to control me, you know, well, then they're not for forgiven. It's that simple.

Five things, my friend, **assurance, peace, mission, gift of the Holy Spirit, judgment.**

Oh, we serve a God of love, that's for sure.

But never forget we serve our God of judgment as well. Thomas called Didymus, one of the 12 was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples said, "We've seen the Lord." And he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nail in his hand and put my finger in the nail marks and put my hand to his side, I will not believe."

Doubting Thomas, what a label!

This man has gotten a bad rap. My friends, Thomas was undoubtedly a man of God. I mean in this gospel a little earlier, Jesus said that he had to go back to attend to Lazarus, which was not a good idea to the other apostles because that would be very dangerous.

But it was Thomas who says, **let us go also so that we may die with him.** Thomas was fearless.

Or how about that time when Jesus said, "Where I'm going, you know the way." And everybody looked at him like, you're crazy. We don't know the way you're going. Nobody knew what he was talking about, and nobody said anything. Silence.

Finally, it was Thomas who pipes up and says, "Master, we do not know where you're going. How can we know the way?"

He was not afraid to ask the question that everybody else was thinking. And when everybody else was hiding in the upper room, and Jesus appeared, Thomas wasn't there, which begs the question, well, where was he? I mean, scriptures are silent to this. We don't know. So, I don't know where he was, but I can tell you where he wasn't.

He **wasn't hiding**, up with all the other guys in the room. No, my guess is that he was wandering the streets of downtown Jerusalem looking for the person that stole the body. So, when he showed back up and they said, "Well, we've seen the Lord," he was like, "Save the drama for your mama."

I mean, he scoffed. Why? Because he required more information. Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands and put my hand in his side, I will not believe. Now a week goes by, and the disciples are again inside, and Thomas is with them.

So, first of all, a week goes by and what are they doing? Well, they're still hiding.

So, what happened to the assurance?

What happened to the peace?

What about the mission

What about the Holy Spirit?

They're still hiding.

They're still gripped in fear.

But before we point our finger in judgment, what about you and me? How many of us are hiding, afraid to share our testimony to the suffering world, afraid that somehow, we might offend somebody? Consider this. When Jesus showed up the second time and he just came through the door and said, "Peace be with you," again, what did he do?

He said, "Thomas, you come over here, Thomas, put your finger here. See my hand. Put your hand to my

side and do not be unbelieving but believe."

Now, how would he know to use the very words that

Thomas spoke as evidence had he not been there, right?

I mean, maybe he wasn't physically there when Thomas

said that, but he was there and he witnessed the denial of Thomas just as he is with us today, witnessing our denial, watching our silence.

But there's hope. Look at how he treats Thomas.

He doesn't go over there and call him out on the carpet, start berating him about his lack of faith and belief, no, not at all. Jesus never called him 'doubting Thomas', someone of the early church gave him that name.

He meets him exactly where he's at.

Just as he will meet you exactly where you're at.

Do not be unbelieving but believe.

And Thomas answers, "My Lord and my God."

And Jesus said, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?"

"Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed." He's talking about us. I mean, Thomas was there. He was an eyewitness. He had a big advantage.

But we have two things that he didn't have.

Number one, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Remember, this is pre-Pentecost.

So, Thomas didn't have the Holy Spirit yet.

Number two, we have the New Testament.

We have his word. And Jesus reveals himself through his word. And you can't know the word if you don't read the word. So, if you feel like you've never met him, maybe you should consider picking up his word today. And if you are struggling with seeming doubt as Thomas, simply ask Jesus to reveal himself to you and then pay very close attention to your life. It might not happen today or even tomorrow, but at some point, if you keep on asking, Jesus is going to put his finger on your heart and something is going to happen in your life

that this unbelieving world will call coincidence, but  
you'll know differently and you will be able to say,  
"My Lord and my God."

You might be struggling with doubt right  
now. Some might say doubt is the opposite of faith,  
but they're wrong.

Doubt can be the seed.

Doubt can be the doorway to faith.

It certainly was for Thomas.

Seek Jesus today and he will reveal himself to you.

And the church said, AMEN.

-Rev. Katie Dailey, in process 4/5/2024