Sermon Transcript Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah.

Amen. All right, this is the first week. Now, first of all, we need to look at a couple of things. We all know the story of Thomas, or at least we think we do. Doubting Thomas. "Oh, unless I see His hands and His side, and I put my hands in the nail holes, and I put my hand in His side, I will never believe." And we go, "Oh, how foolish of you, Thomas. How could you be so stubborn and obstinate that you refuse to hear the word of the other apostles? Obviously, they have seen the Lord."

Well, it is true that they had seen the Lord, but they didn't believe it themselves. When you get to the first time, when the 10 of them were locked together in the room; first of all, they were locked in a room. Why in the world were they in an upper room with the doors locked? Because they were excited that Jesus is risen from the dead? Because they were confident in the testimony of the two women who came to tell them, "He is risen, we have seen Him"? Even John and Peter went to the tomb. And yet where do we find them still? In a locked room, hiding. Maybe they were gathering together, maybe they were praying, we don't really know, but they were together, and the door was locked.

Why was it locked? I suspect it was locked because they were afraid. Now, what were they actually afraid of? There's several possibilities. They're afraid possibly that the Jewish authorities or the Roman authorities were going to come and take them away because all this craziness has taken place. The soldiers fainted on their post; that was an embarrassment. The tomb is empty; that was an embarrassment. We need to get rid of these ne'er-do-wells, these guys that are spreading these strange stories, and let's not talk about this whole tomb thing.

So, maybe they were afraid of the authorities, and they were just keeping quiet in a secluded corner somewhere, where nobody will hear them or see them. Maybe. Or maybe, in fact, they were just slightly a little bit afraid that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Now, why would that make them afraid? Well, think about it. What did they do when the people came and arrested Jesus? They scattered to the four winds. They ran away. You know, Peter drew a sword and cut off an ear, okay, so that was one "brave" act, but then Jesus told him, "Put your sword away," and He healed the guy. So, obviously, Peter didn't know what he was doing. And then later on, he starts following Jesus, he abandons Jesus, but he kind of sneaks back and tries to kind of guess what's going on. But he gets there, and he's accused of being a member with Jesus, and he denies it three times, totally falls flat on his face.

So, what is a person to do when your entire cadre of followers has abandoned you? Maybe you are justifiably a little bit upset at them. Maybe You're going to come back, if You're going to come back at all, and haunt them. Or maybe You're going to accuse them, or if You did rise from the dead, maybe You're going to just cast them to the side, tell them that they were fools, and go find different people who are going to be a little more faithful. We don't know. Or maybe He's actually going to judge them and say, "You rejected me, so now I'm going to reject you. You could've been My followers, but you failed, so you're out of here."

I mean, these are probably some of the thoughts that are going on in the disciples' minds. But Jesus comes through the locked door. It's important. Physical body, Jesus is not a ghost, He is not a spirit, He is a physical body. He can be touched; He can be seen. He does still eat; we find out later on.

So, Jesus comes amongst them, and what is the first thing He does? He shows them His hands and His side. See, the other ten also had to see the hands and the side before they would believe. Same thing as Thomas; Thomas was just bold enough to say the words. Everybody else was just scared silent, and they're like, "You ask Him. No, you." Nobody was going to say anything, because they were scared stiff. So, Jesus preempted their question, and He showed them the hands and the side, and they believed, the ten believed because they saw... Well, we're going to get into that. They saw the hands and they saw the side.

Now, a week later, they're all confident-ish, because where do we find them a week later? In the same locked room. Why? Because they're not completely figuring this thing out. They don't quite know what to do with the message that Jesus is risen from the dead. They're still a little bit afraid, still a little bit confused, not sure where to go or what to do. This time, however, they brought Thomas along with them, and Thomas makes his bold statement, "Unless I see the hands and unless I see the side, I will not believe." He just said what they were all thinking; he just said it out loud.

Doubting Thomas? Okay, I'll give that to you. How about Doubting Peter, and Doubting John, and Doubting Andrew, and Doubting Philip, and Doubting Patrick, and Doubting John and Mary and Joe? How about Doubting Everybody? We all doubt. We all doubt God and His Word. We all fall short of being confident of the grace of God, and we all need the same things. They saw the hands and feet, but what really brought them to firm foundation was the Word of God that He spoke to them, giving them the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, which gives us life: gave life to the dry bones in Ezekiel, gives life to the disciples to go out and minister to the world, gives life to us in our baptisms when we receive the Spirit of God and are made alive in Christ.

See, it is always the Word of God with the Spirit. The Spirit goes forth with the Word to accomplish what God desires to take place. And so, the disciples, like us, were converted through the Word. They heard the Word, and they believed it. They had the extra opportunity of actually seeing Jesus, but then again, by faith, we also see Jesus in His body and blood. Now, it takes faith to see that, but it's there, because we believe the Word of God that says, "It is My body and My blood."

And you have to remember about Thomas, and part of the reason why I went in this direction is if you go back about nine chapters or so in John, it has the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. And right before they get there, you know, Jesus tarries, and the disciples are asking questions, and Jesus is saying, "Well, Lazarus is sick," and all of this. And finally, they're just not getting it, so Jesus says, "Lazarus died. Okay? He's dead. Now let's go see him." And all the disciples are going, "Why do we need to see him? He's dead. You could've gone anytime earlier, and he would've been alive, and maybe You could've healed him, but now You're going because he's dead. I don't get it."

But Thomas says, "Well, let us go with Jesus and die with Him." Because Lazarus was right next to Jerusalem, Jesus was already stirring the pot, and it was getting to the point where the Pharisees and Sadducees and all the leaders of Israel were getting really frustrated, and they were afraid of revolt, they were afraid of upheaval, they were afraid of Romans coming down hard against them. And so, they were preparing to figure out a way to get rid of Jesus, and everybody knew this, and here is Jesus heading towards Jerusalem by way of Bethany. And Thomas is going, "Well, if we're going to go to Bethany and Jerusalem to die, let's go with Him. If that's what Jesus plans to do, let's follow Him." Doesn't sound like exactly the most doubting of individuals. Sounds pretty confident, pretty sure of who Jesus is and what He's going to do.

Now, again, much like our lives, are there times in our lives where we have very little faith in the Word of God? Absolutely. I mean, think about the times when you're worrying and fretting and doubting, and you wonder, "Is God really here? What is going on in this world? Can God really still be present? What is going on in my life? Can God still be present? Does God really love me, or am I being punished for what I've done?" I mean, we all have those doubts at times in our lives. And then there are other times where we can walk in faith and say, "I know that God is going to take care of us. I don't know how, but I'm trusting the Word of God to sustain me."

So, we have the dips and the peaks and the valleys, just like Thomas, just like Peter, just like the rest of these disciples. The story here in John is not Doubting Thomas as somebody unique and special in the world, but Doubting Thomas as in doubting like the rest of us, inconsistent in our trust of the Word of God, and yet God is still gracious to him, and therefore God is still gracious to us. We can still be confident that our sins are forgiven. Not because we're completely faithful and confident in our faith at all times, not because we're anything out of the ordinary, but simply because God's Word has said He loves us and He forgives us. And the proof is the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who breathes on His disciples, as He breathes on us, the peace of God.

"Peace be with you," He says. "As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you," and He breathes on them the Holy Spirit. Receive the Holy Spirit. We all have received that Spirit of God. We all have received that Word of God, and we are all sent to serve each other in love, in the joy of our salvation. Yes, Christ has died, and that was awful, but in that death, He paid for our sins, and to prove it, He rose from the dead. God has accepted the sacrifice; we no longer need to be afraid. We can readily go to the cross, beg for forgiveness, and be confident.

Jesus says to us, "See My hands and My side. I did this for you. Your sins are forgiven. Here's the marks to prove it. And trust Me, I'm not dead, I am alive, and so also will you." God has promised, as we hear in Ezekiel, that He will put His Spirit within us, and we shall live, we shall live in our own land, and we will know that He is the Lord. He has spoken, and He does it.

We stand firm in the confidence of the Word of God to bring life from death. Even our own physical death brings life everlasting in Christ. So, there is nothing to be afraid of. "See My hands, see My side, and believe. Your sins are forgiven." May His grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you always, now and forever more, unto life everlasting. Amen.