

... Speak to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. All right, so first off, let's get to Thomas. Doubting Thomas. We need to remember that Doubting Thomas gets a bad rap. If you think about who he is and what he has done, you'll notice that Doubting Thomas is very much insufficient in describing who he is. So if you'll remember when Jesus was getting ready to enter into Jerusalem the final time for his final Passover and his passion, he's told the disciples, "I'm going to go to Jerusalem, they're going to arrest me, I'm going to get beaten, and then I'm going to die." And of course, Peter, in all of his wisdom, said, "Surely not, God forbid, that's not going to happen." And Jesus had to tell Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." But Thomas had a different response. Thomas said, "Well, let us go with him and die with him." That doesn't sound very doubting to me. That sounds pretty solid, pretty determined that he was going to follow Jesus.

Now like the rest of the disciples, Thomas abandoned Jesus when the soldiers came. So he wasn't any different. So here's the thing. Thomas gives us comfort because there are times when in the face of uncertainty, he is strong and he understands the will of God and he's confident. And then there are other times when he doesn't quite get it, when he doesn't really understand what's going on and he needs a little reassurance, he needs a little comfort in his life. And think of this, Thomas was no different. He just said out loud what all the other disciples were thinking. I mean, honestly, look at what John says in his epistle, First John. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands." What's he talking about?

He's saying, "I had to touch Jesus' hands and his side too. I needed that reassurance just as much as Thomas did." You notice what Jesus ... And we have proof of that right here in the gospel. Jesus shows up in a locked room. And of course, because He just shows up, the first thing that He's got to tell him is, "Peace. Don't be afraid." I mean, think about it. If somebody would just show up in the middle of this congregation without having entered through the aisle, a lot of us would be a little freaked out and we need a little reassurance. And so Jesus comes and he says, "Peace, peace be with you," just like the angels have to do when they show up. Peace.

But more than that, that the disciples were in a locked room for fear of the Jews. But I suspect maybe it wasn't just completely a fear of the Jews. Think about this. They'd been following Jesus for three years. They were supposed to be His loyal disciples. And at the moment of crisis, when He really needed the support of His friends, what did they do? They scattered to the four winds. And now they've got all these reports that He's alive, that some people have seen them. And now they're

wondering, here He is in the midst of them and they're wondering, "Okay, are you here for our good or are you mad at us?"

I mean, think about it. They abandoned Him. Why would He be gracious to them? Maybe He was a little upset at them. Maybe He was coming to punish them or to chastise them. What did they know? He appeared out of nowhere. That's going to frighten you to begin with. And then you know that you abandoned Him, you know that you denied Him, you knew that you did not believe, and you were not there when it counted. So why is He back? And why is He coming to you? Is he mad?

Well, fortunately, He reassured them from the very beginning, "Peace be with you." And that's a comfort for all of us as well, because there are times in our lives when we have not done the right thing, when we have failed to stand up for what is right, when we have done exactly the wrong thing, and we know it. We have sinned against God and fought [inaudible 00:04:25], and we know that we've sinned. And sometimes we come and we're like, "Is God mad? Am I still part of the family? Does He really love me?" I mean, I don't know. But that's where we hear the peace. "Peace be with you." And what is the peace of God? It is the salvation that He has given to us and that salvation in that peace is not just words. It is the person of Jesus Christ. He is our peace. His presence is our peace. His wounds in His wrists and in His feet and in His side are our peace. They offer us the assurance that the death of Christ was for us.

Now, Thomas wasn't with the other 11 disciples on that first day of the resurrection. That's what happened. In the evening of the first day, they're in this locked room and there's all sorts of confusion going on. You've got some of the women saying they'd seen Jesus alive. Several people went to the tomb. They didn't know what was going on. They came up with these crazy stories. The stone had been rolled away. There were these figures in white sitting around all over the place telling you it's weird stuff. Those two disciples that went to Emmaus came back and said they'd seen the Lord. What's going on? For whatever reason, Thomas wasn't with them. I don't know. Maybe he found a hiding place by himself or maybe he was afraid, or who knows? We don't really have an understanding of what happened and why Thomas wasn't with them. For whatever reason, he wasn't. So they come back and they say, "We've seen the Lord." And he's like, "Yeah, I've got to see it for myself." But then again, that's exactly what the disciples said. The ladies came back the first time, "We've seen the Lord" and they're like, "Yeah, we've got to see it for ourselves." Everybody was doubting, everybody was questioning, everybody was unclear of what was going on. Thomas just said the silent part out loud. "I've got to see, I've got to touch before I'm sure and certain." And we also need that in those times when we're afraid, when we're uncertain of

what life is going on, we need to know the presence of God. We need to hear those words, "Peace be with you." Because we're not going to find peace in our internal thoughts. We're not going to find peace when we look out into the world. We don't find peace until we hear and we see God.

And we haven't seen Jesus Christ. I mean the human body of Jesus Christ, although He is present in with and under the bread and wine every Sunday. So He is here. He is present with us. He's present in His word because His salvation and His Word, that is Him Himself. And so we gather together to hear those words of peace be with you. In times of fear, when we're not sure what's going on, we need to hear the word of peace. In times when we know we've fallen short and we've not done what is right, we also need to hear that word of peace. And you and I, if we're honest with each other, there've been times when we were very, very much outside of the will of God. Even today, John says in his epistle, First John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us."

The fact of the matter is that's true today as well. Even though we are baptized, we're brought into the family of God, sometimes we wander, sometimes we abandon our savior when we should stay close to Him. And how are we certain that He's here for our great, for our benefit and not for our judgment? Because, because the people who saw Him recorded what He said and what He said was, "Peace. Peace be with you." And then in addition to that, He added this, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained as well."

But this is the commissioning of the apostles who then eventually commissioned the pastors to be able to stand before you on any given Sunday and declare to you that we have forgiven your sins. I say, "I forgive you your sins." Not because there's some power within me, but because God has given the authority to the apostles, who then gave it to the pastors, who then passed it down to me, and I give it to you.

So I can say with absolute certainty, I forgive you your sins because I am His called and ordained servant, and as His called and ordained servant, I just declare to you what I've seen, what I've heard, same as John was recording. He recorded what he saw and what he heard, so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And because of that, we have peace. Peace in the midst of turmoil, peace in the midst of strife, peace when we know we don't deserve it. It's ours because he has promised it and because the people who saw Him and touched Him recorded it so that we might know for sure.

Now, Thomas, again, let's get back to him. There is a tradition that Thomas made it all the way to India and maybe even China with a gospel. This does not sound like Doubting Thomas. This sounds like a real person who sometimes is strong and

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sometimes is weak, kind of like you and me. In fact, the tradition is that the gospel made it to India before it made it to Germany, and that was because of Thomas and his witness and his evangelism of the gospel all the way through Asia. This is a real person who is sometimes good, sometimes not, sometimes it's confidence, sometimes is doubting. They're not characters. They're real people who have real issues. They're not holier than thou people who never get it wrong. They're just like you and me, just like I'm not any holier than anybody else when I tell you that I forgive your sins in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ, because even when I'm doing that, I'm declaring it to myself as well.

The pastor of Faith Lutheran Church is declaring that Patrick is forgiven of his sins as much as everybody else out there is forgiven of their sins. It's a glory ... I don't quite understand how that works, but it does work because God's Word gives it to us. We are forgiven because God has given us His forgiveness. He has given us His peace. May that grace and that mercy and that peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen. We confess the faith that God has given to us, in the words of the ...