

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 2C
April 24, 2022
John 20:19-31

From Unbelief to Faith

[Thomas] said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:25-29 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Today's Gospel is about faith – the disciples didn't have it. Whatever faith they may have had, was gone. They hadn't believed Jesus' words when He told them what would happen to Him – that He would be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be killed, and on the third day rise again. They hadn't believed the reports of the women that Jesus was risen from the dead. Peter and John had run to the tomb, but Peter didn't know what to make of it, though we are told that John believed. The disciples' unbelief led them to hide in fear behind locked doors, much like Adam and Eve hid among the trees in their unbelief.

So, it's hard to believe that Jesus chose such men to be His Apostles. They'd followed Jesus for three years, heard His preaching and teaching, and saw Him perform miraculous signs, but in the end they abandoned Him and watched Him die. Now we see them hiding behind locked doors in fear. There is no way they were worthy of Jesus' patience or mercy. But neither are we, for we are often much like those disciples. We, too, are often without faith. And yet, Jesus died for them, arose for them and appeared to them, even as He has done for us.

Still, consider what had happened. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, out came water and blood. His sacrifice was too great! It shook creation and blotted out the sun. It is too much. But even in His anguish and His sorrow, His love was ever pure. It did not waver. It never faltered. He gently bestowed and gave what we had no right to expect or demand, what we sought to steal by force and violence. He prayed for us to the very end. And the prayer of a righteous man avails much! He poured out His life that we would have it and live. From those five holy wounds, from the nail prints and open side, came our hope and our life.

Thus, Thomas, like the other disciples, was brought back to faith by those same holy wounds – the scars in Jesus’ hands, feet, and side. Those five holy scars restored faith not because they prove that Jesus is the One who was crucified and is back from the dead, that He who died that brutal and merciless death outside the city gates is risen and lives. They do demonstrate that. But so does eating broiled fish and walking through stones and doors and across the waves. Those scars restore faith because they are the doorway of Grace.

His blameless flesh was penetrated by hate. But that violence set His life free. The Blood of God came forth to answer all of Hell’s demands. No one took His Life from Him. He is Lord. He gave it. He laid it down as a sacrifice. He satisfied the Law’s demands and appeased His Father’s wrath. He stopped the devil’s accusations. He gave peace and hope to men. From those holy wounds, from the scourging and the thorns, from the nails and the spear, and out of death’s tomb comes the salvation of the world. The Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world is alive and we are saved.

Three days after He died, He entered that upper room where He had given His Body and His Blood. He did not come to rebuke or chastise the disciples, but rather to give them the peace He had won for them. He breathed His Holy Spirit upon them. He sent them out to bestow that same peace and Spirit, to forgive sins and enlighten the hearts of men, to preach the glory of the cross and the beauty of those scars!

The Church of Jesus Christ, in existence already in the garden of Eden, was established Easter night in its final form. It was chartered in forgiveness. Its mission and purpose was clear: forgive sins. The Apostolic Office was immediately a greater and fuller office than that of prophet or priest. It was given to the apostolic ministry to stand in the stead of Christ and deliver His Blood, not as a sacrifice to the Father, but as a gift to His people. Now all believers are priests. They all eat the Bread of Life, the Flesh of Christ, that which was sacrificed, and are united to Him. The apostolic ministers speak Christ’s words in the first person. They forgive sins and whoever they forgive is forgiven. They make alive in Holy Baptism. They rename fallen men: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They preach the Word. They do not merely foretell things to come or establish a pattern in worship and in life of God’s interaction with man. They preach Christ crucified and risen. They preach the fulfillment of all things. Their preaching bestows the Spirit and peace, the same Spirit and peace given those disciples. It forgives sins and reconciles men to the Father.

This is the Ministry that God provides even unto our day. The men who fill it are not any better than the fearful disciples who hid behind locked doors. They have their personal doubts, their acts of betrayal and cowardice, their self-centered worries. But through these earthen vessels God’s Kingdom expands. His Word shines forth despite their weaknesses. Sinners are baptized and absolved. They hear the Word and receive the Body and Blood. Sins are forgiven. Whether the ministers understand it or not, the Word of God goes forth and faith is born. And the gates of Hell shall not overcome it. For Jesus Christ is risen! All this grace flows from the blessed marks of the violence He suffered.

He bears those scars in the perfected and ascended Body of the resurrection. They are not blemishes. Nor are they signs of our failure, of what we have wrongly done to Him. They are not meant to induce guilt or sorrow - quite the opposite! Those scars are the mark of His Office. He was anointed to thus die and rise again. It was His heart and will to redeem us with His Blood. Those scars are the constant reminder of His love and our freedom in grace. Abel's blood is silent. Justice has been satisfied. The scars on Jesus' hands, feet, and side restore faith. They inspire Thomas to worship and to pray: "My Lord and my God!"

God grant you such faith that finds its object in Jesus, the One who died and rose for you. For such faith relieves fear, gives you peace, and helps you to resist sin and temptation. For no one who intentionally lives in sin, who insists on remaining in sin, has such faith. He condemns himself to fear, death, and hell. But the one to whom Jesus comes, to whom He gives His peace, His forgiveness, He gives repentance and the power to fight against such sin. For such is the death and resurrection of Christ for you. By God's grace in Christ alone, you can and will proclaim of Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" To Him be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener