

He Lives!

To Give Me Proof & Peace

A Sermon on John 20:19-31

Year A - Easter 2
23 - April - 2017

JJ¹

As much as the human race says it wants peace, it sure struggles at it, doesn't it? For as much time, effort, money, even human lives that have been put into making peace, we don't do a very good job. It's because one of our natural inclinations is to not trust people. Sometimes that is used to our advantage, but more often than not, it's to our great disadvantage. Even when peace is declared, we demand proof in addition to the declaration of peace. There's been many a soldier who kept fighting the war long after peace had been declared. Just as much, there's been many a pillow-fight truce broken as soon as the other person wasn't looking.

But the place the world most lacks peace is in our hearts. Today we have one of the most basic and shocking examples in Thomas. Today we begin a series of sermons focusing on the Gospel readings which proclaim: **HE LIVES!** Today we see that Jesus lives **TO GIVE ME PROOF & PEACE.**

Of all the places you would expect to find Jesus' disciples on the first Easter you would not expect them to be hiding in a house with all the doors locked. You would expect to find them eagerly waiting at Jesus' tomb that first Easter morn-

ing. Instead they are filled with fear, hiding from the Jews, worried that what happened to Jesus may soon happen to them.

They didn't believe in Easter. Even when the women came to the Eleven after seeing Jesus, not one of them believed what they said "because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Lk. 24:11 NIV). Only when Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" did they believe.

But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

At this time, Thomas didn't believe in Easter. In Thomas you see what is in the heart and soul of all those who reject Easter—who reject Jesus' resurrection. Thomas is frustrated. He's in denial. He won't even trust the word of his closest friends. Refusing to believe in Jesus' resurrection has left him without peace, because the denial of Jesus' resurrection leaves no room in the heart for faith (1 Cor. 15:13-17). How strangely and sadly

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

amazing that the sinful, guilty heart so strongly refuses the peace it needs.

Why do people have guilty consciences? Because they don't have peace. Their conscience is working together with their natural knowledge of the law and it tells them something is wrong—that they're wrong—something isn't right with them. Problem is, the sinful heart doesn't know where to look for peace. Sometimes it creates its own god, but that only leads to more guilt. Sometimes it tries to bury it under drugs or alcohol, but again, that only creates more guilt. Sometimes the sinful heart tries to soothe itself through more money or possessions, but still, no peace.

And so people get frustrated. They get angry because things aren't going the way they want them to. They'll even blame their problems on the God they claim isn't real! Their frustration then leads to denial—denial that their sin is real. They do all they can to destroy the God who says he will judge all people. And finally, when that still doesn't work, they complain like Thomas. "Show me!" "If he shows up and shakes my hand, then I'll believe." Oh, friends, how often these doubting thoughts and behaviors live in you and me!



But you see, just having Jesus stand in front of you isn't what leads to peace. That wasn't the main reason why Jesus revealed himself to his followers. The main reason why he appeared to them was so that they would be eye witnesses of his resurrection. We're never told that Jesus appeared to any unbelievers, and that makes sense because whether pre- or post-resurrection, the physical presence of Jesus didn't create faith in people's hearts.

The women at Jesus' tomb prove this point. The angels announced Jesus' resurrection and reminded them of Jesus' own words to them. They remembered his words and believed. Jesus' words to Thomas prove this point too. In the Greek, Jesus doesn't make a statement, but asks a rhetorical question: "Is it because you have seen me that you have believed?"

Friends, this is why every disciple, every follower of Jesus already should have had peace in their hearts before they ever saw Jesus alive. They had Jesus' words and promises!!! Jesus told them time and again that this was exactly what was going to happen. Yet you don't find one follower of Jesus at his tomb early on Sunday morning waiting for Jesus to rise from the dead. It's because they didn't listen to and believe Jesus' words. That's why you still find Thomas doubting even a week after Jesus' resurrection.

Now, the name Thomas means *twin*. Thomas was likely named this because he had a twin. But guess what, Thomas

didn't just have a biological twin, he has countless spiritual twins. Friends, I am Thomas' long lost twin. So are you.

How many times have you heard the glorious truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead? How many times have you been assured that every sin is forgiven for the sake of Jesus who died for you? How many times have you heard God's promise that he is working all things for your eternal good? How many times, and still your heart is so quick to be troubled with doubts that challenge your faith?

To know and believe that we have a risen Lord who lives and rules eternally renders every fear foolish! And yet, like the disciples cowering in fear in a locked room, we fearfully flee from those who would challenge and mock our beliefs!

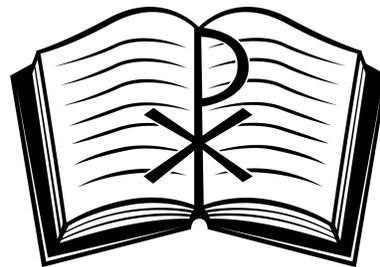
How quickly our sinful hearts condemn us as fools for believing in a risen Savior we have never seen. And so we doubt! So often we forget what it means that **JESUS LIVES!** So often we don't live in the beautiful **PROOF & PEACE** Jesus gives us!

But how wondrous a thing it is that we have the same Savior as Thomas! How great Jesus' patience is with his disciples, with Thomas! How great Jesus' patience is with us! Yes, Jesus rebukes them and he rebukes us for our littleness of faith, and how slow we are to believe all that the Lord has written for us. Yet, Jesus still

showed them his hands and his side! Even though Thomas spoke of seeing and touching Jesus in unbelief, Jesus speaks his words right back to him! Jesus knew what he said!

It's just like John's Gospel begins with Jesus telling Nathaniel that he knew and saw Nathaniel before he ever met him. To hear Jesus' words caused Nathaniel to confess, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!" (Jn. 1:49 NIV). In the same way John's Gospel ends. Through his *words*, Jesus proves to Thomas that he is his Savior-God. That's

more than enough for Thomas to repent and confess his faith, "My Lord and my God!"



Friends, our Lord comes to us in the same gentleness and patience. His words alone which resonate in our ears and il-

luminate our eyes *are* enough for us, but so often we think they are not. Yet just like Thomas, Jesus knows our weakness and invites us to see and touch and taste. We see, touch and feel the waters of Baptism that wakes us from our spiritual slumber. Every time we witness this grace we are given tangible evidence that we've already been buried and raised again with Christ!

We shouldn't need to literally taste and see that the Lord is good. He's already told us so in his Word! And yet he invites you to stretch out your hand and take and eat and drink his very body and

blood! He does this to show you that all your fears and doubts have been conquered and therefore have no place in your heart.

Friends, in God's Word you have all the proof that you need that **JESUS LIVES!** Jesus says to you, "Peace be with you!" How can he say this? Because the peace treaty between us and God was written in Jesus' blood and accepted by our heavenly Father when He raised Jesus from the dead.

I know sometimes we think it would be better and easier if we could just see Jesus with our own eyes now. But that isn't how God has chosen to operate. Jesus says that you and I "who have not seen and yet have believed" are the ones who are blessed. Faith has never been about seeing with our physical eyes. That's why it's call faith. Paul reminds us that, so long as we live in this body "we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7 NIV). But the day is coming when we will reach the goal of our faith, eternal life. And when we reach this goal we will no longer live by faith but we will live by sight! Until that day, friends, rejoice! Rejoice that **HE LIVES! HE LIVES TO GIVE YOU PROOF & PEACE! Amen.**

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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