

Second Sunday of Easter – 2022

Acts 5:12-32

Revelation 1:4-18

John 20:19-31

I read somewhere that the other apostles gave Peter an alarm clock as a birthday gift. They were a cheeky crew. The sound that the alarm made when it went off was a rooster crowing three times. Do you want to be judged by your worst day? Do you want to be remembered for that time that you completely messed up? How would you like to have the scarlet letters “Doubting Thomas” hung around your neck? Anyone can fall off the rails.

What kind of a friend do you suppose Thomas would make? After this whole episode, I mean. Do you suppose Thomas would be kind, forgiving, supportive of others, humble, generous with grace or do you suppose that Thomas would be vindictive, mean-spirited, keeping a record of others’ wrongs and quick with a sharp word? To be sure, the Lord corrected Thomas. Jesus called His disciple to account in the most memorable way. This correction was totally public, out in the wide open. John recounts the event with vivid detail. In my mind, it is one of the most memorable, most dramatic and captivating episodes in all of Holy Scripture. Did this incident follow Thomas around for the rest of his life? Did those who know him repeatedly say: “Tell us again Thomas, what did you say on the first Easter when the apostles told you that they had seen the Lord?” “And what did Jesus say to you a week later?” “Tell us again!”

Have you ever struggled with your own unbelief? Have doubts ever put your faith in a full nelson? Thomas had a stout heart. After Lazarus fell ill and Jesus decided to return to Judea, the disciples were aware of the danger. “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?” (John 11:8). Jesus then made it clear that He was going to restore dead Lazarus, irrespective of the danger. That’s when Thomas said something that highlights his stout heart. “So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’” (John 11:16). Thomas had a stout heart. And it had been blistered when he saw the Lord crucified. It was upside down... Thomas’ world, Thomas’ mind, Thomas’ sense of the divine and righteousness and what is and what should never be... it was all upside down. Spiritual vertigo caused words to spill out of his mouth that he would come to regret. “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” (John 20:25).

It was emphatic. Buy why? The disciples brought good news, remarkable news, an epiphany of Easter light was bounding from the report that they delivered to Thomas: “We have seen the Lord” (John 20:25). He was absent the first time. Thomas wasn’t in the room when the risen King appeared to His disciples. On that occasion, when the Lord entered that room full of fear, Jesus made a solid declaration: “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Then the Lord Christ showed them the evidence of peace – the wounds, full of grace, which were in His flesh. Love and triumph and eternity and PEACE were in those wounds. God’s Word does what it says and when the Lord announced His Easter blessing the disciples were overjoyed. That’s the Word which the brothers brought to Thomas. And Thomas spit it out of his mouth. Why?

I suspect that you have seen your fair share of people who turn away from the faith. People struggle. Life is hard. The world's temptations are always in overdrive. The media is a satanic cesspool of rancid unbelief. Our hearts grow bored; we are fickle and prideful and ungrateful and lazy and easily distracted. One of our biggest problems is that we want to be liked... by the wrong folks. Some people begin to think that Christianity is too much to live up to. Some people discover that they can't control the pastor and so they leave. After Covid, some folks think that it's just as religious to walk the dog on Sunday morning and pray so why go to church? Sometimes terrible things happen to faithful people and blame mingled with anger over their misfortune is put at God's feet. Thomas had seen the One he loved brutally tortured. In Him was life and the forces of evil, the culture of death, robbed Thomas' Rabbi, Thomas' Lord of life. In Thomas' mind, it had all fallen apart.

What's the most important part of that last phrase? In Thomas' mind. Absolutely nothing had fallen apart. Evil meant it for evil, that is true. Ah, but evil is not in control; God is. God meant the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth for good and that's precisely what it is. Thomas' mind needed to be reordered. Thomas needed to be corrected by grace. The crucified and risen Christ comes into the same company, now plus one, and He utters the same magnificent phrase: Peace be with you. And then Jesus turns His attention entirely on Thomas. The very things that Thomas said that he must do in order to stop disbelieving, Jesus beckons him to do. Imagine; the power of His person, the visible evidence of Jesus' absolute commitment to Thomas, Jesus' absolute commitment to life, Jesus' absolute intention to sweep away the fearsome forces of sin and death and hell – those wounds, speaking to Thomas words of comfort, of assurance, of grace and divine authority – all that coming to bear on this one man. “Stop unbelieving and believe.”

Do you honestly think that Jesus wouldn't do the same for you? Do you honestly believe that Jesus *hasn't done the same for you*? His Words and His wounds – they are presented to you in vivid living color every time your ears hearken to the Gospel. His Words and His wounds are the twin testaments of this Divine Service. His Words and His wounds comfort your spirit when you are distressed. His Words and His wounds restore you when you flounder in doubt and skepticism. It's grace; God's grace in Christ is what keeps us tethered to the resurrected Lord of life. We get sideways. Peter started sinking in the sea and the Lord's hand plunged into the water and pulled Him up. When you kneel at this altar, what is the Lord saying... “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). This is the greatest triumph that this world will ever know: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, was crucified for the sins of humanity and has paid the enormity of that price. He defeated death by taking death into His body. He is so holy that death couldn't hold Him. He is risen. Death has no mastery over Him. Death has no mastery over us. That liberating word of grace will never change. “Peace be with you.”

“Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). We get sideways; for a million different reasons, we get sideways. He knows. He corrects us by grace, by love, by reapplying His Words and His wounds. Humility, devotion, and a gracious spirit are all born of that restoration. I suspect that Thomas was the very best of friends to have. Freely he received. Freely he gave. Knowing that you have received something that you don't deserve gives rise to all the best personal attributes. I also suspect that Thomas told his story willingly, happily. His statement of

acclamation and faith is one that all believers should treasure and rehearse: “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus is risen from the dead and brings forgiveness to the least and the lowly and the forgotten and the troubled and all those who get sideways. We become vessels of consolation to those who distance themselves from Christ for one reason or another. This world will always need the Gospel. This world will always need those whose lives are anchored on the Gospel. This world will always need the One who is the Gospel. To Him be glory forever and ever.