

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Second Sunday of Easter
April 24, 2022
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Blessed to know that Jesus lives.

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” ²²After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.”

²⁶After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.”

²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

—John 20:19-31

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Jesus is alive. There is no doubt about it. Jesus lives. Even though the disciples saw Jesus brutally murdered, he kept his promise. It was just as he had said time and time again, “**But after three days I will rise.**” And on that first Easter Sunday, it was clear that Jesus kept his promise. The disciples heard the reports of the empty tomb. They were told of the message from the angels. They heard the report that the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene. And it’s safe to say that by the end of the day they had believed. They knew that Jesus was physically alive. John saw the empty tomb with his own eyes and believed. The other disciples heard it from Peter and believed. Jesus is alive. And you would think that that truth would be cause for celebration, joyfully running through the streets telling everybody they knew: Jesus is alive.

And yet, John tells us that on that Easter night, the disciples were gathered in a locked room “**because of their fear of the Jews.**” Even though they knew that their Lord was alive, they still did not know what that fully meant for their lives. Fear of what could happen to them as followers of Jesus was still very powerful in their lives.

Therefore, when Jesus came to those disciples behind locked doors, he says some of the most comforting words. “**Peace be with you!**” (John 20:19b). Oh, those are such comforting words. Those words are more than just a friendly greeting. Everything is okay. You have peace with me and peace with God. Don’t be afraid! Don’t be afraid! I’m alive, and I have accomplished my mission of bringing you peace with God. Peace be with you. Don’t be afraid. Oh, those are such comforting words from Jesus.

After Jesus overcame his disciples’ doubt with his peace, they were overjoyed to see him. But there was one disciple who was not there to rejoice with them: Thomas. Where was he? We’re not told, but his absence hurt his faith.

I think there is a warning there for us, my friends. Whenever we pull away from the fellowship of believers, no matter what the reason, our faith can’t help but suffer even if that faith was once strong. Thomas had not been a lukewarm believer. Just days before the crucifixion he had said that he would rather die with Jesus than live without him (John 11:16). Those were promises that the disciples, including Thomas, had told Jesus. It makes me think of our confirmands who will stand before this congregation in a few weeks and essentially say the same thing. I would rather face death than to turn away from Jesus. Thomas confidently said that. He was not a lukewarm follower of Jesus.

But this Thomas now refused to believe the testimony of his fellow disciples. "They had seen the Lord? No. I can't believe it." He doubted it. He wasn't going to believe it unless he could see Jesus with his own eyes. Such a statement betrayed more than doubt; it revealed stubborn unbelief. Why would Thomas' two eyes be more reliable than the twenty plus eyes that had already seen Jesus? And why would these men, with whom he had spent three years following Jesus, lie to him about this? Thomas went as far as to say that unless he could put his own finger into Jesus' nail marks, he would never believe.

Thomas was in danger of losing his faith. Stubbornness can lead to unbelief and therefore eternal judgment. And what's scary is that stubbornness is something that we all struggle with. How many marriages, how many business partnerships, and how many friendships has stubbornness ruined? We all can think of people, maybe even ourselves, where stubbornness has created a wedge in relationships. My friends, don't let it ruin the most important relationship you have: your relationship with Jesus.

When a fellow Christian approaches you and speaks the truth in love regarding a sin in your life, don't dig your heels in and stubbornly refuse to listen. In humility, listen to your fellow family members in Christ. They only want what is best for you. They want to connect you to your living Savior.

I imagine that the disciples continued to reach out to Thomas, probably every day that week. They were not going to give up on Thomas. They kept telling him that they had seen the Lord. They weren't about to abandon Thomas and let him flounder in his unbelief. They kept persisting, even though Thomas denied. "Thomas, Jesus lives. He is alive. We know it. We have seen him."

What's even more remarkable is that Jesus didn't give up on Thomas either. A week later when the disciples were crowded in that locked room again, this time *with* Thomas, Jesus appeared to them and again greeted them with peace. "**Peace be with you.**" Yes, this greeting was also meant for the unbelieving Thomas. In fact, Jesus directed his next words specifically to that disciple. He invited Thomas to put his fingers in his hands and side. By encouraging the very thing Thomas had demanded, Jesus showed that he had known all about Thomas' doubts. But now he was inviting that wayward disciple to place all his doubts in his Lord's hands. And that's exactly what Thomas did when he confessed: "**My Lord and my God!**" (John 20:28)

Oh, I would have loved to be there that Easter week to see the resurrected Jesus. Wouldn't that be great? Wouldn't it be just fantastic if Jesus appeared before us today? We could see him, touch him, hug him. Wouldn't that be great? My friends, I'm certain that Jesus will not appear to you on this side of heaven, like he did for Thomas. Today, we live by faith, and not by sight. Jesus was talking about you when he said to Thomas, "**Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**" Oh, sure, it's not easy to believe that Jesus is alive and living and ruling over all things in this world when everything in the world tells you the opposite. It's not easy to believe when you've been hurt by the troubles of this world. It's not easy to believe when you are surrounded by people who cast doubts in your head. It's not easy to believe when you're in pain and you're afraid of the future and your prayers aren't immediately answered the way you want.

But for followers of Jesus, there's something inside of them, something inside of you that makes you blessed. It's faith. God the Holy Spirit has put this gift inside of you. You believe, even though you don't see Jesus. You trust even though you can't put your hand inside his. You have faith that Jesus lives even though you have not hugged him. You have no firsthand proof, but you have the only thing you need: the Word of God. We have eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive, and they have shared what they saw. God has written those testimonies in his precious Word. And that, according to God, is all you need to believe. That's why God gave us the Bible. The apostle John says, "**These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**" We are blessed to know that Jesus lives.

In a few moments many of you will come forward for the Lord's Supper; you live by faith, not by sight. You come up here, and all you see is bread and wine. That's all you taste, but you believe that there's something else here, the true body and blood of Jesus. You believe that there's more than just people at the communion rail; there's God himself, and it's not just the pastor saying that you're forgiven, it's God himself.

You can look up into the blue sky and believe that there's something behind all that; there's a real heaven with a real God and real angels. You believe that because you live by faith and not by sight.

You look at the world differently. You look at people differently. You even look at unanswered prayers differently. You look at all the events of the world differently. You look at life and death differently because you believe in Jesus Christ, who has died and who has risen from the dead. Even though you can't see him, you believe in him. And that makes you blessed. You are blessed to know that Jesus lives. Amen.