

Easter 2            4/11/21  
John 20:19-31    B

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Gospel lesson for this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter is always Jesus appearing to the disciples on the evening of His resurrection. Every time I read these verses; I always have to ask: Where was Thomas? The Evangelist simply tells us, “Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came,” but he doesn’t tell us where Thomas was; why he was not with the 10.

Maybe he was home sleeping; it was Sunday, after all. Maybe he was out enjoying God’s good creation, at the golf course or the lake.

Maybe he didn’t like the pastor, if we can call Jesus that. After all, they thought He was going to restore power and wealth and glory to the nation of Israel, instead He was arrested, beaten, and crucified as a common criminal. That was disappointing!

Or, just maybe he didn’t like the other members of the congregation he was a member of; after all, they were sinners. The treasurer – if we can call Judas that – had stolen from their treasury, betrayed Jesus, and then took his own life. That self-righteous chairman, if we can call Peter that – had boasted, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away...Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.” Then, at Jesus’ trial, when it was pointed out to the chairman that he was with Jesus, he denied it, “I do not know him.” And, let us not forget that when the going got tough, the rest of them all got going -- away from Jesus. They all deserted and denied Him. Even though they had seen Him alive, they doubted and hid behind locked doors in fear that those who killed Jesus would soon come from them.

Maybe this is why Thomas decided just to stay away from the evening meeting of their congregation on that first Easter. Perhaps he was too put off by some of the things the other members had done and said, and so he decided he didn't want to be part of those sinners anymore.

The Evangelist John does not tell us where Thomas was or why he wasn't with the others, because it really doesn't matter. When they told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas did not believe. Thomas rejected their eyewitness testimony and said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the make of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Thomas absented himself from their fellowship and only ended up hurting himself. He is, after all, known as "Doubting Thomas" and this is why Jesus corrects him, "Do not disbelieve, but believe."

In Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle writes, "We walk by faith, not by sight." But, how often we find ourselves stumbling about in doubt? Are there times when you doubt God loves you, that He cares about you, or that He is even with you? When the drought comes, you doubt if it will ever rain. When the flood waters come, you doubt they will ever stop. We see the terrible destruction by hurricane or earthquake or shooting and wonder why a God of love would not do something to prevent such horrible tragedy. We hear cancer from our doctor and wonder how God can work good in this. We are weighed down by the weight of our sin and we doubt that Christ has taken away the sin of the world.

We doubt. We doubt God's Word because of the Old Adam of sin who lives inside of us which does not believe the promises of God's Word and does not want to live a holy life according to that Word.

If anyone would not want to be a part of this congregation, it should

have been Jesus! Jesus should have just given up on them -- the treachery of Judas, the hypocrisy of Peter, the utter failure of all the other disciples. And, yet, the amazing thing is, despite all their faults and failures, their doubts and fears, "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!'" the same words He repeats eight days later when Thomas was now with them.

Let us very clearly understand what Jesus meant by His words, "Peace be with you!" This was not a simple greeting, a "Good evening"; a "Hi. How ya doing?" These are words of absolution, forgiveness. Jesus knew that in the weakness of their mortal nature, the disciples were not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. So, He forgave them of their sin and breathed His eternal life into them.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We celebrate this day our Lord's resurrection. We celebrate His resurrection because He was laid to rest in the tomb's dark portal. He died because He took all of our unbelief and doubt and all of our sin and carried to the cross, where He died as the punishment for it. By His rising to life again, He won for us the forgiveness of our sins, earned a place for us in heaven, and brought us God's peace, that peace which passes all understanding.

Our Lord Jesus didn't want Thomas to remain in unbelief, so He came to Him. Our Lord Christ does not want us to remain in unbelief or walk by doubt, so He comes to us just as He did Thomas and the ten. He is with us and comes to us today through the means of grace.

It is right here, in His Church, that the risen Jesus comes to make the forgiveness He won of the cross and the victory of the empty tomb of Easter morning our very own through the means of grace: Baptism,

Absolution, and His Holy Supper. These are the means that God Himself has chosen to give you faith and keep your faith strong.

Jesus is present in the Word and water of Holy Baptism. “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” the Bible says (Ti 3). “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word,” we learn in our Catechism. And again, in our Catechism we learn, “With the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit.”

In our Gospel lesson for this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, the risen Jesus “breathes” on His disciples. This brings us back to creation. God formed Adam from the dust and breathed His life into it. Our life comes from God. In the fall into sin, we lost the life God gave to us. So now, on Easter, God – Christ in human form, risen and alive – breathed His life into His disciples, giving them His victory over death and grave. “The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus says, “are...life” (Jn 6:63).

Jesus is also with us as He is present in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. In the eating of His Body and the drinking of His Blood, the forgiveness Christ won on the cross is made the forgiveness for your sins, and where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation. As you are dismissed from the Lord’s Table, you are dismissed with the words, “The body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you steadfast in the true faith to life everlasting.” In the Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord Jesus does strengthen and preserve your faith.

As He came to the disciples huddled behind lock doors and declared, “Peace be with you,” to forgive their sins and give them faith, so, through the means of grace, Jesus comes to you here today, in His Church, to give

His peace, forgiving you of your sin and giving you faith, so that with Thomas we may boldly confess, "My Lord and my God!"