

April 7, 2024 – Easter 2

**John 20:19-31: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”** <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Dear friends of our risen Savior:

2000 years ago, where would you have been on that first Easter Sunday evening? If we were close followers of Jesus—Jesus’ disciples—then there’s a better than 90% chance that we’d be in that locked room that is the setting for our text: We’re told, **On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.** We can’t be too critical of the disciples for “hiding behind locked doors.” The Jewish leaders had falsely accused Jesus and had him executed. It wasn’t a stretch to think that those same enemies of Jesus might now come after them. And so fearing for their safety, they have gathered in a barricaded room. 10 disciples, minus Thomas.

What is good for us to realize is this: While just one disciple has earned the nickname “doubting Thomas,” he wasn’t the only disciple on that first Easter who had doubts. In Luke 24 we have a parallel description of that Sunday evening appearance. By this time the disciples had heard the report from the women at the empty tomb about the angels’ message, had heard from Mary Magdalene how Jesus had appeared to her, and had heard from the two Emmaus disciples how they had walked with Jesus. Yet in

spite of all of this proof, what is their reaction when Jesus appears in the locked room? **“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?’** It’s Jesus himself standing in front of them, the same Jesus who over and over had told his disciples he would die, but that he would also rise...and yet they doubted. By the end of the evening, they believed; but then Thomas still doubted. And then a week later, Thomas believed. What led 11 men to change their minds? Weeks later, those disciples would say, “That’s an easy question. It’s not what, it’s who... “Who conquered our doubts? Jesus!”

2000 Easters later, what about us? Who conquers our doubts? Easy answer: “Jesus.” But how does he do that? Our theme this morning is: **God’s antidote for doubt**

1. **A tomb that is empty**
2. **Promises that are not.**

**A tomb that is empty:** If you are—or could be—artistic and someone asked you to sketch or paint the three images of Jesus’ life that are the most profoundly significant, which 3 scenes would you choose? I believe the top three answers would be Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection. Would you agree that for us today, those three pictures are a package deal? If we believe one of them happened, then why wouldn’t we believe the others?

That wasn’t the case that first Easter morning. The disciples may or may not have known the details of Jesus’ birth, a manger and a stable. Jesus’ crucifixion? That was an image that was fresh in their minds. Even if they weren’t all standing at the foot of the cross on Calvary, we know that John was there, and John would have told them in sobering detail all that had happened. But the empty tomb on Sunday morning? That glorious scene that is such a vivid image in our minds was a very abstract concept that Jesus’ disciples failed to anticipate and comprehend in spite of Old Testament prophecies and in spite of at least 3 occasions when Jesus’ clearly said, **“On the third day the Son of Man will rise.”**

How would we have reacted that first Easter Sunday? We’d like to think we’d have run to the tomb with Peter and John. We’d like to think that maybe we would have been a little quicker than the Emmaus disciples to figure out who was walking with us. But let’s not be arrogant enough to think that there’s no way that we would have been hiding behind locked door or presumptuous enough to believe that when Jesus appeared in front of us we wouldn’t also be **“startled and frightened.”**

You realize that the list of doubters found in the pages of scripture is lengthy. Doubt wasn't a weapon that Satan used for the first time on Easter Sunday. Doubt has been an integral part of the devil's arsenal since the Garden of Eden. "Did God **really** say that you must not eat of any tree in the garden?" And Satan has been planting seeds of doubt in the minds of God's people ever since. God promised Abraham that he'd be the father of many nations, yet Satan managed to get Abraham and Sarah to doubt that promise, and so Abraham slept with Hagar. God promised the Israelites he would deliver them to the Promised Land, yet time after time they doubted that God knew what he was doing. Jesus told Peter to get out of the boat and walk on water, but Peter's faith wavered and he began to sink.

It's no surprise then that on that first Easter Satan resorted to his favorite weapon... the arrow of doubt. So what does Jesus do? He takes the disciples back to the empty tomb. Not back to that Jerusalem grave carved out of stone, but back to the empty tomb prophesied in Scripture: We're told in Luke: **44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."** **45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.** **46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day..."** He walks them back to all of God's promises.

Of course, just when we're tempted to wonder "how could they not get it?" we look in the mirror and come face to face with our own long list of sinful doubts. How often are our minds are clouded with doubt in spite of what our eyes of faith should so clearly see. It's not on Easter morning when I doubt the message of Easter. It's at 3:00 in the morning when I lie awake thinking, "God, no matter you say in Romans 8, what's happening to someone I love right now is never going to work out for their good." Maybe you have never sat in church on Easter Sunday and said to yourself, "I wonder if my Redeemer lives." But you've heard "**God will provide for all of your needs,**" and you've thought, "But what about..." I've listened to Jesus' promise "**Ask and it will be given to you**" and I've thought, "But I have asked, and I'm still waiting." We know that the apostle Paul says that if this earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building, a mansion in heaven not built by human hands. And we look forward to that home, yet we doubt God's wisdom in taking someone that we love and now miss so desperately—taking them long before we're ready to lose them. And perhaps the worst doubt of all: "**We**

**know that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin,”** and yet we wonder about THAT sin. And then I realize that the arrow of doubt that Satan pulled out of his quiver in the Garden of Eden, the arrow of doubt he used on Easter morning on the disciples is the same arrow that so often pierces me.

**II.** Sometimes I wonder which is worse...my doubts, or the guilt that is the result of my doubts. The answer for both our doubts and our guilt is the same: Because of that first Easter, **God’s antidote for doubt isn’t just a tomb that is empty on, it’s also God’s promises that are not.** When Satan used his favorite tactic to attack the disciples in the days after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus didn’t pull out some never-seen-before secret weapon. He responded the way he always does. In our text we’re told that when the disciples were gathered in that locked room **Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”** <sup>20</sup> **After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

Jesus spoke directly to their doubts and fears: **“Peace be with you.”** Such a common Jewish greeting, but more than just empty words and a pious wish when it’s spoken by the one who delivered true peace between God and man <sup>40</sup> some hours earlier on Good Friday, and when it’s the same words Jesus had spoken just days before in the upper room on Maundy Thursday: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14).**

And then, as is so often the case with Jesus, he doesn’t just simply speak words of comfort, although his words should always suffice. He also connects his words to something tangible. In the parallel account in Luke we’re told that after he said “Peace be with you,” **[the disciples] were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.** According to the prevalent superstition of the day, the spirits of the dead roamed the earth after death. <sup>38</sup> **He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”** <sup>39</sup> **Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”** <sup>40</sup> **When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.**

And then he walks Thomas through that same process: <sup>26</sup> **A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among**

**them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

On that first Easter Sunday Jesus gave the disciples the evidence they needed. That was really nothing new. Throughout his ministry, time after time, Jesus had given them concrete confirmation of who he was: at a wedding in Cana, on a fishing boat that he sent out at the wrong time of the day to the wrong part of the lake, on the side of a hill where there wasn't enough food, and then there was more than they needed, from a funeral procession outside of a little town of Nain to a grave in Bethany. And then perhaps the most convincing evidence of all: in the space of about 72 hours he gave them his very body and blood in an upper room on Thursday in Jerusalem, so they could be reassured of his forgiveness; poured out that blood from a bruised and pierced body on Friday afternoon to pay for their forgiveness; and then an empty tomb on the most joy-filled morning in the history of mankind to ink an exclamation point on their confidence that because he lives, they too shall live.

And for the wavering disciple who is known as “Doubting Thomas”? Could it be that I have more in common with Thomas than I care to admit? There's a hymn in our hymnal that I just recently discovered, and it is an example of how hymns can provide fresh insight and deeper appreciation for Biblical truths and are still a vital part of the devotional lives of Christians today.

**Hymn 468: These things did Thomas count as real:**

The vision of his skeptic mind  
the warmth of blood, the chill of steel,  
the grain of wood, the heft of stone,  
the last frail twitch of flesh and bone.

The vision of his skeptic mind  
was keen enough to make him blind  
to any unexpected act  
too large for his small world of fact.

His reasoned certainties denied  
that one could live when one had died,  
until his fingers read like braille  
the markings of the spear and nail.

***“Until his fingers read like braille.”*** Could it be that when our doubts blind us to the clear and certain promises of our Savior, that this might be the answer? That in faith we allow our fingers to trace like braille back through the pages of God's promises fulfilled, promises made and every promise kept: help

in temptation, comfort in grief, days of sorrow followed by days of joy? Jesus told Thomas, “Put your fingers here, see my hands.” In a few minutes Jesus will come to you and say, “Take and eat, take and drink” and you will meet your Savior face to face not in a locked room but right here at a table he has prepared for you.

On the day of your baptism Jesus, through your pastor dipped his hand into a bowl of water and the living water of his Word and signed your adoption papers that God drew up before creation. And every day since then Jesus dips his hand into that same living water of life and cools the fever of your sin and guilt, soothes the heartache of your grief and sorrow, quenches your thirst in the face of your doubts and drowns out the whisper of Satan’s lies. As his precious child, he gives you the evidence that you crave. Blessed are you, for through the eyes of faith you see and believe. Thank God that Jesus’ tomb is empty. Thank that Jesus’ promises are not. Amen.

Pastor David Wenzel