

**Second Sunday of Easter.**

**John 20:19-31.**

**HYMNS: 386, 149, 100, 514, 283, 306.**

**INTROIT: Psalm 148.**

**P** Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens! Praise Him in the heights above!

**C** Praise Him, all you His angels! Praise Him, all His hosts!

**P** Praise Him, sun, and moon! Praise Him, all you stars of light!

**C** Praise Him, you heaven of heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

**P** Let them praise the name of the LORD! For He commanded and they were created.

**C** He set them in position for ever and ever. He gave a decree that will not pass away.

**P** Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths.

**C** fire and hail, snow and fog, wind and storm, which carry out His Word.

**P** You mountains and all hills, you fruit trees and all cedars.

**C** You wild animals and all cattle, you reptiles and winged birds.

**P** You kings of the earth and all peoples, you princes and all judges on the earth.

**C** You young men and also you maidens, you old men together with young people!

**P** Let them praise the name of the LORD! For His name alone is exalted.

**C** His majesty is above earth and heaven.

**P** He has raised up a horn for His people.

**All Praise from all His devout people, from the people of Israel, the people who are close to Him!**

**Praise the LORD!**

**COLLECT:** Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C Amen.**

**READINGS:**

**1<sup>st</sup> reading: Acts 5:29-42.**

**Epistle: 1 Peter 1:3-9.**

**Gospel: John 20:19-31.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

The text for our sermon for this morning is written in the book of John 20:19-31 which was our Gospel reading before.

**19** That Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews. Then Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!"

**20** After He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

**21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you."

**22** After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit! **23** If you forgive any people's sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people's sins, they have been retained."

**24** However, Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called "The Twin," was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."

He told them, “Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the marks of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I shall certainly not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors had been locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you!”

<sup>27</sup> Next He told Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at My hands! Take your hand and put it into My side! Stop your unbelief, and believe!”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus asked him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. <sup>31</sup> However, these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

Recent headlines from the Middle East tell us that many Christians are losing their lives because of their faith. What many people don't know is that many of these martyrs can trace their faith back to the Apostle Thomas. While the Bible doesn't tell us much about Thomas, extra-Biblical histories indicate that just as Paul went West, Thomas went East.

Historical artefacts seem to place Thomas in the area of Mylapore, where Santhome Cathedral and the Basilica & shrine of St Thomas is in India, at the time of his death. The accounts of his death vary widely, but the most likely account indicates that Thomas died of spear wounds when four soldiers pinned him to the ground with four spears.

In spite of the fuzziness of the historical record, we do know that Thomas was a faithful apostle of Jesus Christ. We know that he proclaimed the gospel and many of the Christians who are losing their lives to the sword of the Islamic State can trace their faith back to Thomas. There are even a few active congregations that claim that they were founded by the Apostle Thomas.

In spite of all the wonderful work God did through the Apostle Thomas in his later life, the world will always remember Thomas as Doubting Thomas. He missed the appearance of Jesus on that first Easter evening, and he refused to consider the eye witness account of his fellow disciples. Therefore, his legacy as Doubting Thomas will remain until the Lord returns on the Last Day.

Strictly speaking, doubt is not the right word to describe Thomas. Listen to Thomas again. He said to them, “**Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the marks of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I shall certainly not believe.**” Thomas didn't say that he wasn't sure. He didn't say that he needed time to think. He said, **I shall certainly not believe.** Thomas didn't merely doubt. He flat out did not believe. Hence that's why we should call Him Unbelieving Thomas.

But before we're too hard on Thomas, we need to check out the other disciples. Listen to their response when the women returned from the tomb and reported that they had seen Jesus. <sup>10</sup> The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them. They told these things to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> However, these words seemed like nonsense to the Eleven, and they would not believe them. [ Luke 24:10-11.] So, all the disciples were unbelievers until Jesus revealed Himself to them. The first time Jesus showed Himself to the disciples, He was showing Himself to unbelievers.

Jesus would have had the right to show up and really get into His disciples. “**You thick-headed people, I told you over and over and over again that I was going to rise on the third day. How come you never got it?**” Jesus had the right to do that, but He didn't. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “**Peace be with you.**” Instead of telling them off, He gave them peace. They deserved wrath, but Jesus gave them peace.

Jesus even showed them the wounds of the cross in His hands and side. In fact, it's these wounds that show the price Jesus paid so that He could even give peace to the disciples. These wounds tell us that Jesus hung on a cross. It was while He hung on that cross that He faced the hell that these disciples deserved for their thick headed stubbornness - for their refusal to believe everything that Jesus had told them.

These wounds tell us about our salvation as well. We also sin daily and deserve nothing but eternal punishment. Nevertheless, for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we receive eternal life.

This is the most important news of all times and places. This is news that everyone needs to hear. So what amazing plan did Jesus have to spread this good news throughout the world? Today's Gospel has the answer to this question. Jesus unveiled this plan right after He showed Himself to His disciples. **21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you."** Did you hear that? To send someone is to make them an apostle. Jesus basically told the disciples, "Up until now, I have been the apostle of the Father. Now, you are to be my apostles."

Now hang on a minute! I've heard about these guys. You remember Peter. Jesus had to scold him with the words, **"Get behind me, Satan!"** [Mark 8:33.] Then there were James and his brother John who asked Jesus to place them at His right and left when He came into His glory. How many times do we read that these men tried to establish a pecking order amongst themselves arguing over who was the greatest. They ran away as cowards when Jesus was arrested. These are not stellar examples of virtue.

Then, as if sending these guys out as His Apostles wasn't strange enough, He gave them even more authority. **22 After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit! 23 If you forgive any people's sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people's sins, they have been retained."** It's as if He said, "You know that forgiveness that I just finished earning with my suffering and death a few days ago? I now give you the authority to administer that forgiveness in my name."

Think about it. A few hours earlier, these same men refused to believe the report of Jesus' resurrection. Now Jesus has commissioned them to be His apostles and administer His forgiveness. If I were there, I would turn to Jesus and ask, "Jesus, are You sure You want to commission these losers as Your apostles? Do You really want these guys to take over from You?" Then again in the reality of things I would probably be the same!

You see, God regularly works in these strange ways - ways that make no sense from a worldly point of view. When Moses was forty years old and all fired up to be the great liberator of Israel, he might have taken credit for liberating Israel. So God sent him out into the wilderness. Then, when he was 80 years old and didn't want to go back, but God sent him to Pharaoh. Gideon was terrified of the Midianites and didn't want to fight them. So God sent him out with 300 soldiers to take on an army of 120,000 Midianites. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, but God drafted a fish into making sure that Jonah went anyway. So a grumpy old Jonah told Nineveh that God was about to destroy them and they repented. An up and coming Pharisee named Saul was arresting Christians for trial and consenting to their executions. Then Jesus knocked him to the ground on the road to Damascus and called him to proclaim the Gospel. Augustine lived the immoral life of a spoiled playboy until God got a hold of him. Then he became one of the foremost theologians of the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

It seems as though God goes out of His way to scrape the bottom of the barrel of humanity in order to find His servants. In every case, God took away any chance of boasting on the part of the human being. In every case, the odds of human success were so pathetic, that it's absolutely certain that only a miracle of God could provide success. The absolute helplessness of God's servant showed the power of God's salvation. If I were God and it were up to me, I would have set aside a few legions of angels to do my preaching for me. The holy angels are way more dependable than human beings. Humans have a bad record of messing things up. Never the less, that's not what the true God does. He places foolish, sinful men into the office of the ministry as preachers. Then He puts the administration of the forgiveness of sins into the mouths of those same foolish, sinful men. When He needs to proclaim salvation, He sends sinners to proclaim it. It makes no sense from a worldly point of view.

The comfort for Christians in all ages is that no matter how odd or weird or boring or ugly or whatever their pastor is, they can know that their salvation is sure. It's sure because it does not depend on the pastor. Instead, it's God Himself who deserves all the credit for our salvation. Jesus Christ earned it on the cross. The Holy Spirit delivers it in Word and Sacrament. Your pastor is merely the servant who administers the gifts God gives to you.

The Gospel account we heard today tells how Jesus came to a bunch of unbelieving cowards, and gave them forgiveness and peace. He then appointed them as Apostles and gave them authority to administer the forgiveness of sins. Even though the world would say that these men were totally unqualified, the Holy Spirit used them to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.** [Acts 2:47.]

The plan of the Lord hasn't changed. He still sends sinners to tell other sinners about salvation. He still gives sinners the authority to forgive sins. The wisdom of the world insists that this is a plan that can never work. The forgiven sinner knows that the foolishness of this plan simply shows that it does not depend on human power. Instead, our salvation is provided by

**God the Father's grace for  
God the Son's sake through  
God the Holy Spirit's gift of faith.**

When it comes to our salvation, God does all the work, and He loves to do that work in you. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

**3rd Hymn: 100,**

Prayer of the Church Second Sunday of Easter

P Let us shed our doubts and come joyfully before the Lord in prayer, confident that He will hear and answer us according to His promise.

*Brief silence*

P Lord God, like Thomas we wrestle with faith amid doubts and fears. Grant us Your Holy Spirit so that believing, we may see, and, seeing, we may rejoice in Your Son and in the power of His resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, You know the hearts of Your people and those who have wandered into error or have fallen away from the faith. Rekindle faith in them and restore them to the fold, that their voices may be one with us in prayer and praise again. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, the threats against us are great, but You are greater still. Deliver us from conflict, war and oppression, and provide for us good, wise and honourable leaders who will serve the causes of justice and freedom for all. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, without Your guidance, we are lost. Give to Your Church faithful pastors who will preach faithfully at all times and missionaries through whom Your Word extends to those still in the darkness of sin and death. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, we live in community with our neighbours. Make us good citizens, and give to us good government in our cities and towns. Open our hearts to the stranger, and help us serve our neighbours in love as Christ has served us. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, the trials and troubles of this mortal life weigh heavy upon us. Give to the sick and those who suffer the consolation of Your grace and healing according to Your will, *[especially for*

*,]* that we may have courage, confidence and peace in

every circumstance. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, the things of this world too often distract us from the one great treasure of Christ, who died that we might live and who lives that we might never die. Guide us in the use of things, that we may ever be grateful for Your gifts and use them wisely for Your purpose and glory. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, even as we remember the Passover in this Holy Supper, we anticipate the heavenly and eternal meal to come, rejoicing to know that the divisions of time and space will be bridged and all Your children will be together in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom without end. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Lord God, we have learned to trust in Your mercy and to abide in faith amid all circumstances. Even now, we pray without fear that Your will be done for us, among us and through us, and that in all things we may learn to be content in Your grace and favour; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **C Amen.**

**4th Hymn:514.**