

Second Sunday of Easter
JOHN 20:19-31.
HYMNS: 321, 327, 100, 103, 286, 514.

Introit: Psalm 148.

P Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens!

C Praise Him in the heights above!

P Praise Him, all you His angels!

C Praise Him, all His hosts!

P Praise Him, sun, and moon!

C Praise Him, all you stars of light!

P Praise Him, you heaven of heavens,

C and you waters above the heavens!

P Let them praise the name of the LORD!

C For He commanded and they were created.

P He set them in position for ever and ever.

C He gave a decree that will not pass away.

P Praise the LORD from the earth,

C you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

P fire and hail, snow and fog, wind and storm,

C which carry out His Word,

P you mountains and all hills,

C you fruit trees and all cedars,

P you wild animals and all cattle,

C you reptiles and winged birds,

P you kings of the earth and all peoples,

C you princes and all judges on the earth,

P you young men and also you maidens,

C 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, praise from all His devout people,

All 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 with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

1st Reading: Acts 4:32-35.

Epistle: 1 John 1:1-2:2.

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 the sermon is the Gospel heard before, John 20:19-31.

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.”

26 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!”

27 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!” - 28 Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Jesus asked him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!” - 30 Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. 31 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 in 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, 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. We should call Him Unbelieving Thomas.

But before we are 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. “**The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them. They told these things to the apostles. 11 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 get up the disciples. He could have said something like “*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 scolding them, 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 and He could still 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. Jesus said to them again, **"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you."** Did you hear that? You are sending WHO to do WHAT? 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 wait a minute! We've heard about these blokes before. 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 blokes out as His Apostles wasn't strange enough, He gave them even more authority. 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 say, *"Jesus, are You sure You want to commission us, I really don't think we're up to it!"* Do You really want us to take over from You?"

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 and liberate Israel, God sent him back to Pharaoh.

Gideon was terrified of the Midianites and didn't want to fight them. So God sent him out with a whole 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 sometimes 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 is absolutely certain that only a miracle of God could provide success. The absolute helplessness of God's servants 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. Nevertheless, that's not what the true God does. He places foolish, sinful men into the office of preacher. 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 is sure because it doesn't depend on the pastor. Instead, it is 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. I your pastor am 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 surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
Amen.

3rd Hymn: 100,

* Mylapore is an affluent, traditional neighborhood with a number of sacred sites and cultural venues. These include Arulmigu Kapaleswarar Temple, with its elaborately decorated, pyramid-shaped tower; the colonial-era Luz Church, with an ornate, frescoed interior; and the Gothic-style Santhome Cathedral, built on the burial site of Saint Thomas. Nearby, The Music Academy hosts popular South Indian concerts and dance.

Prayer of the Church 2nd Sunday of Easter

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief Silence.

P Lord God, as You gather us together on this first day of the week that Your risen Son may come among us with His gifts of forgiveness and peace, grant us faith to receive Him in joy, that having fellowship with Him we might share in His eternal fellowship with You. Lord, in Your mercy:...

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as Your Son breathed out the Holy Spirit on His disciples that they might bestow or withhold Your forgiveness, let Your Spirit rest also upon the pastors that He sends to serve us, that they may faithfully exercise their office in accord with His Word. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as You have given us all things in Your Son, make us of one heart and one soul, that we may not hold onto the things of this world as though they were our own, but freely share what You have given us. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as Your Son in mercy invited Thomas to touch His wounds that he might not disbelieve but believe, have mercy on all those who struggle with similar doubts and overcome them with Your truth. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as You sent Your Son to save what was lost, forsake not those who have forsaken You; according to Your mercy, work through us to seek out those who have wandered from Your fellowship, that they might walk once more in Your light. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as You have established worldly authorities to uphold the rule of law and maintain the public good, grant wisdom to all our leaders, remembering especially this day our local governments, that our communities may be ordered in peace and flourish in wholesome industry. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as You have brought us into fellowship with You through Your Son, Jesus Christ, sustain all those who suffer in body or mind with the truth of Your presence with them [*remembering especially before You this day*]; hear their cries for help, and heal them in accord with Your good purposes. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as Your Son comes and stands amongst us to feed us with His body and blood, by His victorious wounds strengthen our hearts in faith, that we may not doubt but believe that He has overthrown the powers of hell and saved us from sin and death. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, as Your Son brought His resurrection peace to His disciples, grant comfort to all who know the sorrow of departed loved ones. Let them not be overcome by their grief, but sustain them in the hope of the eternal life that You have manifested to us in Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 103,