

John 20:19-31 ILCW A—Easter 2 April 19, 2020 at Peace, Wautoma

As we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead today, we focus on the gospel according to Saint John, chapter 20, verses 19 to 31. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, take away the doubts of our hearts and replace them with firm trust in you, our risen and living Savior. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters united with me in the new life our Savior has won for us by his resurrection from the dead,

What are some things we do completely by nature? In the evening, we can crawl into bed, but we cannot make ourselves fall asleep or awaken in the morning. Those actions of our body are entirely involuntary. We do not tell ourselves to breathe, but we do it naturally every second of every day. Our hearts beat without needing help from any outside source. We touch, taste, hear and smell involuntarily. Sadly, some things come naturally to us on the spiritual side, too. Nobody intentionally has anxiety or depression. We worry. We fear. We feel guilty and ashamed. At the heart of these, and almost every sin, is doubt. Ever since Adam and Eve, the devil's, "Did God really say...?" has been passed on to every human heart. Among the disciples on that first Easter evening, doubt rears its ugly head. But Jesus has the answer for his disciples, and for us. **Stop doubting and find peace and eternal life with Jesus!**

Stop doubting and find peace with Jesus! On what should have been the day of their greatest joy, fear ruled in the hearts of the disciples. By this point in the day, all of the other disciples had seen and talked with the risen Christ. But for some reason, Thomas was not there. Perhaps he was too afraid to join the others. Maybe the events of the last few days led him to seek a time of quiet reflection in his own private place. But why wouldn't Thomas believe his friends? They had seen so many miracles which defied human explanation performed by their friend Jesus. He had even raised Lazarus from the dead! Why would it not be possible for Jesus to rise from death himself? After Jesus' appearance, "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 it."

What made Thomas react that way to the best news ever? His heart had been trampled by doubts. His mind was hounded by fears. The disciples had been through a deeply distressing couple of days. After hearing Jesus talk openly about his impending suffering and death, he had changed the Passover meal, a meal these men had known from youth. Then in Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot, their dear friend, came with a mob to arrest Jesus. The disciples fled in fear for their lives. After the arrest, Jesus was convicted of false charges by an illegal assembly and had his death warrant signed by the Romans. And he died in such a horrible way on the cross! What hope did these men have left? Where could they turn for comfort? Wouldn't the Jews be coming to arrest them next? We can easily see how such doubt arose in the minds of even normally devoted and faithful men like these.

And can we honestly say our hearts are any better? Most days, we think our faith is pretty strong, even invincible. We can withstand the worst of crises in our lives, or so we tell ourselves. But then the unthinkable happens. A loved one dies suddenly. We get a dreaded diagnosis from the doctor. We unexpectedly end up in the hospital. Our finances take a nose dive. Disaster strikes the family of a friend. A coworker has their position eliminated, and more cuts are coming. How is our strong faith doing now? Is Jesus still the first place we turn to for peace, or is peace impossible for us to find in times of turmoil and tragedy? Even the strongest Christian can be turned into a doubting Thomas by the cruel twists and turns of life in this sinful world.

How does Jesus deal with Thomas' stubborn doubts and the fears which swirled in his mind? We do not see Jesus chastise Thomas or condemn him for his doubts. There is no beating him over the head with the law for his foolishness or weak faith. Jesus comes and soothes Thomas's doubts in a way only he can: with the peace of his gospel. "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." Jesus responded to the wavering heart of Thomas with just the encouragement he needed to strengthen and restore his disciple to a strong faith.

And when our faith is weak, he does the same for us. Jesus brings us the peace our souls need when life twists the knife in our souls. To our hurting and painful souls, Jesus says, "Peace be with you! Your sins are forgiven by my death on the cross." In the wake of an unexpected death, Jesus offers us the peace which comes from the hope of everlasting life only he can give. If we get that unwelcome diagnosis from the doctor, the Great Physician reminds us that he has cured the root cause of all sickness and death, our sins. If our finances take a nosedive, we are still rich in the peace of Jesus. When somebody we know loses their job, we can remind them of their true identity, their true value in life, which is found in Christ alone. If we don't know Jesus, our lives will never have peace, but knowing Jesus means our lives can know the deepest peace, even when to outward appearances our lives are a mess.

What is the secret to a long life? It seems like everyone has their theories. Some people say not drinking or smoking while eating healthy is the key. Still others point to having two beers and a shot of whiskey every day as the fountain of youth. Some people insist on yoga or tai chi. Still others say it doesn't matter what you do, your lifespan is predetermined. But as Christians, we know the "secret" to everlasting life. **Stop doubting and find eternal life with Jesus!**

What is the purpose of this account, yes, even of all of Scripture? John records it for us in the words we sing most of the year as our response to the verse of the day, just before the gospel lesson is read. "But 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." This incident of Thomas' resurrection doubts and Jesus' answer to them is offered to us so that we may place our trust in Jesus as our living, resurrected Savior from sin, hell and death itself. And that trust, that belief, grants to us the most precious of gifts, everlasting life at the side of our Savior in that sweet and blessed country the home of God's elect, the golden Jerusalem of heaven.

Thomas desperately needed that assurance. His faith was in grave danger. The paradox of which Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 was about to be true of him. His doubts threatened to overshadow his faith in Christ. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. If only for this life we have faith in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Those words almost fit Thomas perfectly. He needed the joy of Easter the other disciples were already enjoying.

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" after he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." Now Thomas could share in that joy, the certainty of real life after death, which his brothers in the faith already had. Thomas's doubts were once and for all overcome. Jesus gave Thomas, and us, the everlasting joy of his resurrection victory.

Stop doubting and find eternal life in the resurrected Christ! He has not appeared before our physical eyes to dispel our doubts like he did for Thomas. But we behold him every week with our eyes of faith on the pages of his Word. He will come to us this morning cloaked by bread and wine to assure us that we are his forgiven brothers and sisters in the new covenant of his grace. Jesus has risen from the grave and now lives and rules eternally for our comfort. In Jesus, we have peace when life is cruel and heartless to us. The forgiveness of our sins, Jesus' perfect life, and the certainty of everlasting life bring us the greatest peace. The world cannot hold a candle to that kind of peace. Rejoice with me today, brothers and sisters. In our crucified and risen Lord Jesus, we have found peace and eternal life! Amen.