

Second Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2019

Our Savior's Way

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Alleluia! Jesus Christ is Risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! That's the exact feeling the disciples were missing right about the time of our reading. They had just witnessed, experienced, or heard that Jesus had been crucified and died and now they were sitting in a room together wallowing in their sadness. I mean wouldn't you? The guy you admired. The guy who had done miracles before your very eyes. The guy you believed was the Messiah had died and you, his follower, were supposed to do...what?

It's no wonder the disciples were hiding. They were afraid. Sure, Mary had told them that she had seen the Lord but she was the only one, and her words weren't the most reliable. And besides, the Jewish leaders had succeeded in killing Jesus so why wouldn't they try and kill His disciples as well? So, they hid in a locked room.

In an instant things changed. Suddenly Jesus appeared with them in the room as if He had been there the whole time. The disciples were scared but Jesus immediately brought them comfort saying, ***"Peace be with you."*** It was really Him. It was really Jesus. ***Jesus Christ has risen. He has risen indeed, alleluia.*** The disciples had the same cry at that moment. But this visit wasn't only a social call. Jesus had a job for them to do. He offered them comfort again and then set them to task. ***"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."*** Jesus was sending them out to tell others! To share the Good News of His resurrection and salvation of all people. ***"Go!"*** Jesus said. ***"Go and tell! Forgive sins and let the spirit lead you!"*** Then He was gone.

Many times when we read a Bible passage or look at a portion of scripture, we wonder if there's a word for us to be found. With the passage before us, I think it's pretty easy. Just as Jesus sent the disciples into the world, He sends us. And He sends us with the same power and authority that He sent the disciples. Looking back as His commission for the disciples, Jesus who had come into the world to save it with all of His power and majesty and authority sends us out, in the same manner,

to preach to the lost and hurting and tell them about the great love of God.

I'm sure that the disciples were reeling from what had just happened. They had just seen Jesus and were thinking about what was next. But there was one who wasn't with them. Judas had left them long before, but Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared. I imagine that the disciples could hardly wait for him to arrive so that they could tell him what they had seen. Jesus is alive. Jesus, there in the room with them, talking, just like old times. Jesus had risen and returned to them.

“NO. I won't believe it! Unless I see in His hands the marks of the nails and place my finger in those marks and place my hand in His side...I will never believe!” Thomas's reply no doubt shocked his brothers. How could he not believe? He had been with them up until that point. He had seen what Jesus had done and heard His teachings. How could he not believe? And yet...had they not seen Him, would they have believed?

In my mind, the disciples would have been just like Thomas if they hadn't seen Jesus. Even before Jesus had appeared, something was holding them back. They were afraid. Thomas was afraid. Afraid of being wrong, afraid of what others would say, afraid that everything he had invested in over the past three years was all for nothing. They were all afraid. And we are told specifically that Thomas doubted, but probably so did everyone. The disciples were given a command and sent out. But Thomas didn't believe so how could he go? His doubt and fear were holding him back from being sent by Jesus.

Just as Jesus' sending the disciples is the same for us, Thomas' inability to go is within us too. Just as we are sent in the authority of Christ, we experience the frailty of humanity in fear and doubt. We are afraid that if we ever speak about Jesus things will happen. Maybe our friends will disown us. Maybe we'll get into a fight with someone. Maybe we'll have a debate and lose because we don't know our faith as well as we should. Or maybe it will be worse. We often hear about the Christians in other countries being persecuted. How long before that kind of persecution gets here?

At the same time, we also doubt. Our logical minds can figure out most things or, at the very least, google them to understand how to do something or why things are the way they are. But the resurrection of Jesus...that is different. We can't find the video of Him leaving the tomb

on YouTube. We can't talk to the eyewitnesses. We have doubts. Not so many that they keep us from believing, but enough that keep us from telling others. They keep us from being sent. Our situations sound a lot more like Thomas' than we think. And yet, with all the sinful fear and doubt holding us back, there is hope. Look again at what happened to Thomas.

Thomas did indeed doubt greatly that Jesus was alive. He even got to speak with others who had *seen* Jesus alive after his death and resurrection but still, he didn't believe. And then...then, Thomas saw Jesus. Jesus came in what appeared to be a visit solely for Thomas' sake, speaking directly to Thomas, ***"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe."***

Though Jesus wasn't there when Thomas was expressing his doubts, Jesus knew exactly where his struggles were. He knew exactly what Thomas was thinking, and Jesus met him there. He didn't tell him what he should have done, or how he had failed Jesus by not believing. He walked up to him and showed him what he needed to see in order to be sent as Jesus intended. He showed Thomas the wounds in His hands and side. He invited Thomas to touch them and experience the reality of the risen Christ.

Thomas' doubt melts away and he declares Jesus to be his "Lord and God." Thomas ended his doubt and believed that everything he knew and had heard about Jesus was true. And now he was ready to be sent. Then Jesus says something strange to Thomas. He says, ***"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."***

I get the feeling those words aren't for Thomas alone but for everyone who would come in faith after him. Jesus knows how difficult it is to believe. He knew that we wouldn't have the opportunity that Thomas had to see Him in the flesh while living. He knew it would be harder for us to believe and yet He commends us for it. ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*** That's us. We have not seen like the disciples but we believe. And like the disciples, we're sent out. Jesus said, ***"Just as the father sent me so I am sending you."*** And again in Matthew 28, He says, ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the***

Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The blessing that we have is that even though we haven't seen Him, He hasn't left us alone and unequipped. It's true that we won't know Jesus like the disciples did until He returns again, but John 20 sums up well what we are left with: ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”***

Jesus did all these things so that as we are sent, we are ready. We won't need to be afraid or doubt because He still provides for us. Take Jesus at His word and go! Jesus has sent us!

1. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do?
 - a. Hide and wait
 - b. Go as He is sending them
 - c. Start a revolution in His name
 - d. None of the above

2. Do we have the same job or is it different for everyone?

3. What kept Thomas from listening to Jesus' command?

4. What is keeping you from listening to Jesus' command?

5. True or False? Jesus knew and addressed Thomas' concerns.

6. Who does Jesus say is blessed?
 - a. Those who have believed and seen Him.
 - b. Those who have believed and not seen Him?

7. Jesus tells us to _____!

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” John 20:21