

Pastor Jon's sermon from Sunday, April 19, 2020

Text: John 20:19-31

“Thomas, the Show Me Disciple”

Alleluia Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

In our Gospel for today, we learn that Jesus cares for individuals and their specific needs. This is such good news for us as each of us is struggling in our own way how to handle quarantine and social distancing. We each have different levels of anxiety and fear. We all have different types of grief we are dealing with.

The fact that God cares about little ole me and my faith life is evident in the story of doubting Thomas. I have always thought Thomas gets a bad rap for wanting to see and touch the wounds on Jesus' hands and side. I never viewed this as doubt. The Greek word is actually unbelief. He just wanted his own experience with the risen Jesus like the other disciples had. Nevertheless, his story continues to bring hope to those of us who have not seen Jesus in the flesh, but still believe in him.

Thomas made a cameo appearance back in John 14 with a speaking part during Jesus final discourse at the Last Supper. Jesus tells the disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms and I go and prepare a place for you. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself.” Thomas chimes in, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?” Jesus said to Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Here Thomas wants the details and a map to where Jesus is going. He is a visual and tactile learner.

Thomas reminds me of a friend of ours from Merrill, WI, named Roger. Roger is a genius when it comes to numbers and dates, model years of cars, and zip codes. Roger is getting older and forgets some

of the things now that he used to know hands down. Now, Roger has to write everything down in his book and double check it from time to time before he can relax. He calls us off and on, some weeks more than others, to say hello and double check all of our kids names, spellings, and birth dates. We share things with Roger we wouldn't normally share with anyone other than family, because it gives him a sense of peace in knowing. On top of that, Roger often has a bit of heavenly wisdom to share with me without even knowing it. When people don't answer his calls, he concludes that families are just too busy today to talk on the phone.

The resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter Sunday in a locked room for fear for the Jews. They had already heard from the women that Jesus rose from the dead. But that didn't stop their fear. They couldn't wrap their head around the idea of the resurrection. Jesus then comes to them through a locked door and offers them peace... saying, "Peace be with you" twice. Jesus knows they are afraid. But he doesn't want the recent events, his death in particular, to paralyze them. He sends them outside to do ministry in his name... to go out and forgive sins. But first he breathes the Holy Spirit, not on them as the NRSV says, but into them. Emphasao in Greek. This should recall Genesis 3 when God breathes life into the first humans, or Ezekiel 37 the valley of dry bones when the breath of God animates dem dry bones. The wind, breath, or Spirit of God gives new life. And in Ezekiel's case, new life to people who were in exile. Come Holy Spirit Come.

In our Gospel, we find out in verse 24 that Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared. The disciples told Thomas about the risen Jesus, but Thomas wanted his own experience of the risen Jesus. Seeing is believing. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later, Jesus showed up again in the house with the doors shut. He comes in and reenacts the whole seen just for Thomas, saying Peace be with you and shows Thomas his hands and his side. Interestingly enough, Thomas never reaches out to touch Jesus as he

said he would earlier. He proclaims his faith, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus provided exactly what Thomas needed. This is grace upon grace.

Belief in John’s Gospel is about a relationship with Christ. The way you build a relationship is to spend time with someone... dwell with them. Think of Nicodemus or the woman at the well. They each had their time with Jesus. Each of us needs to dwell with Jesus in scripture so you know Jesus’ unconditional love for you. Thomas had to have his own experience with the risen Jesus before he believed. And Jesus gave it to him, with no condemnation. Jesus didn’t say, “Where were you the first time Thomas?” Ha, Ha, You snooze you lose.

No. I am comforted to know that Jesus didn’t forget about Thomas.

When have you said with Thomas when you recognize the Lord, “My Lord and My God?” Where have you encountered the risen Christ during Covid-19? I think any time we see acts of love and sacrifice for others, we see God. When we experience reconciliation we can say, “My Lord and My God.” Any time you witness grace upon grace we say, “My Lord and My God. I see grace in this text. Thomas was left out. He missed out on a moment with Jesus and felt like an outsider or a kid who moves to a new school. Anytime people are included we can say, My Lord and My God.

Well I can proclaim to you today that you are included in this grace. Jesus has come back for you.

Amen!