

<sup>19</sup>**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!”**

<sup>20</sup>**After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

<sup>21</sup>**Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** <sup>22</sup>**And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** <sup>24</sup>**Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So 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.”**

<sup>26</sup>**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!”** <sup>27</sup>**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.”**

<sup>28</sup>**Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

<sup>29</sup>**Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

<sup>30</sup>**Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>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. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Stop doubting and believe.

Nowadays if you see an amazing picture you assume that it's been photoshopped. If you see a video that seems too good to be true, you figure that it has been altered, or that cgi has been added to it. The old saying goes, “seeing is believing;” but that often doesn't hold true much anymore. We've become cynics—we are often skeptical that something is true. But it's not because of the advances we've made in technology lately. We've been burned too often, fooled again and

again. So instead of believing we doubt. We want proof or verification of some sort.

When we read our gospel for today, perhaps two words popped into your mind: Doubting Thomas. And while Thomas certainly doubted, the other disciples weren't exactly models of a strong faith. By the time the first part of our text for today took place late on Easter Sunday there had been various reports that Jesus had risen from the dead. We know that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden and the other women on their way back from the tomb. He also made a lengthy appearance to two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. And yet, what were they doing when Jesus first appeared to them? They were hiding behind closed doors. They didn't believe the reports about Jesus' resurrection. Luke tells us that when the women told the disciples that they saw the risen Lord they didn't believe them because they thought their words were nonsense.

Plus on numerous occasions Jesus told his disciples that this was going to happen to him. He made references to it again again—references that we can now tell what he was talking about. Such as the sermon text for the sunrise service last week, **I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy...Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.** But let's be honest, that is a veiled reference to the resurrection, but in hindsight we can easily tell what Jesus was talking about—but perhaps not so easily for the disciples at the time. But even if we give them the benefit of the doubt on instances like that, there are still the direct mentions that Jesus made to his resurrection. Five times in Matthew's gospel alone Jesus directly said that he was going to rise from the dead. He even told them he would do so after three days. Plus Jesus makes other direct references to the resurrection—such as the sign of Jonah. That is why the Jewish leaders had guards posted at the tomb—they remembered Jesus saying that he would rise from the dead three days after his death. All these things should have led the disciples to not doubt that Christ had indeed been raised from the dead. Yet, what were the disciples doing three days later despite all the reports coming in? Hiding in fear.

And when Jesus appeared to them that night Luke tells us that the disciples, **were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.** It's amazing isn't. That after everything that happened, they still didn't get it. To be fair once they did realize what happened, they did what any Christian would do and they told others they knew—specifically Thomas who, for whatever reason, wasn't in the room that night when Jesus appeared. But Thomas too didn't believe—he doubted.

He said, **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. Thomas wanted proof.** It was impossible for someone to rise from the dead. So Thomas wasn't going to believe it. He wanted proof. He wanted Jesus himself to verify that he truly did rise from the dead—that his body that was laid in the tomb is now alive. He wanted to see and touch Jesus—until then, until he got proof, he wouldn't believe it.

Thomas doesn't have the best reputation today—mostly because of our text. He doubted that Jesus rose from the dead. We often look down upon Thomas but that is because we fail to take the plank out of our own eye before removing the speck from someone else's eye. You see, we are just like the disciples; we often behave just like Thomas. Not that any of us doubt that Jesus rose from the dead—at least I pray that this is the case. But how many times do we hear God's Word or listen to it and then forget it?

And that can be the case with simple Bible history—a story about Moses or David, or Jesus, or Paul—or what have you. But that's not really what I'm talking about—historical facts can be easy to forget despite the many times that you have heard the story.

But what about the promises of God? What about the basic truths of the Bible? How many times do we hear, yet doubt? You know God promises to watch over you and protect you, but when things don't go your way, you begin to question whether or not that is true—and you assume that either God doesn't like you or that he has lied to you and doesn't have the power to help you out. You know what God says about any kind of sex outside of marriage including homosexuality, but the world tells you otherwise. Everyone is doing it, it's not a loving thing to do to judge others, so doubts start creeping into your head as to what is right. We can say the same thing about abortion, the

roles of men and women, the creation of the world and on and on. Then there is salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. We know this to be true. Yet it goes against nature. We are naturally inclined toward work righteousness; and so we think that we must be good to be saved; that if you are nice enough, pray enough, and so on that God will take you to heaven.

How quick we are to act like Thomas and the other disciples! How quick we are to forget what we have heard despite the many times we have heard it. How quick we are to doubt what we have heard and read.

Jesus knew the doubts and worries of the disciples. So he appeared to them suddenly that first Easter night. While the doors were locked, he was instantly standing among them. He showed them his hands and his feet. He ate fish in front of them. Jesus truly did rise from the dead! With a glorious body, in his state of exaltation Jesus was standing right there in front of them!

And he said, **Peace be with you!** Three times Jesus said those most beautiful and comforting words—twice to the 10 disciples on Easter evening, and once a week later to Thomas. Jesus knew the doubts and worries that were in their hearts. And he wanted to dispel their fears, so he appeared to them and brought them the peace that only his resurrection could bring!

This peace is more than the common Hebrew greeting, shalom. First, it is the peace of forgiveness. Peace of mind knowing that our sins won't be counted against us—nor will we be treated as our sins deserve. Jesus' resurrection is proof that God accepted the sacrifice of his blood for our sins—that he became our substitute and died in our place.

It is also the peace of sure hope of eternal life. Jesus' physical resurrection is a guarantee that we too will follow after him. On the Last Day all bodies will be raised. And through faith in him our bodies and souls will be joined together in heaven. For an eternity we'll enjoy a perfect life with our Savior. Death has been destroyed and eternal life awaits!

When Jesus appeared to Thomas and Thomas saw his hands and his side and heard his voice, Thomas gave a great confession of faith, **My Lord and my God!** Jesus is God. Not just a god, or even just the Son

of God, but God himself. He is the second person of the Holy Trinity. In Jesus God died but rose from the dead victorious.

And he is the Lord—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God who created the world and rules over the world. The one who call Moses out of the burning bush—the Great I Am. He is the God of free and faithful grace. And by not correcting Thomas, Jesus confirmed that he truly is our Lord and God. Perhaps we shouldn't remember Thomas as Doubting Thomas any longer, but by this great confession of faith!

Jesus replied to Thomas' confession, **Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.** Thomas was like us—he was the cynic; until he saw Jesus and then he believed. But why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? How can you believe in something so foolish, so contrary to reason? Because of the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who works faith in you through the gospel to believe in someone you have never seen or heard. He is the one who brought you to faith and keeps you in the one true faith so that you now believe in something so ridiculous.

And he does this through the gospel. Notice what John says in verse 31, **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.** Through the gospel in Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and strengthens faith—those are the means of grace and nothing else! Through the Word and Sacrament then, the Lord comes to us with the same peace as he brought Thomas and the other disciples.

So we do as Jesus told the disciples, **As my Father has sent me, so I am sending you.** Jesus sent them out to spread the good news of the gospel—the message of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life won for us and given freely to us by Christ. They doubted it at first, as we often do. But makes them and us the perfect vessels to share the good news to the unbelieving world. Notice what the disciples did after they saw Jesus alive—the went and told someone they knew the good news: Thomas.

He may have doubted, but now, through faith he is in heaven. So we spread the gospel—using the same tools as the disciples—the gospel of our Lord so that others may stop doubting and believe; just as the

Holy Spirit leads us to do on a regular basis through the gospel. And as we turn to that gospel when we doubt God's Word we will be blessed—blessed by the Holy Spirit who will bring and keep us in the one true faith, faith in Jesus as our resurrected Savior—our God and Lord. Amen.