

Gospel of John: John 20:19-31 **With Faith Comes Belief!**

Last Sunday we were called to believe in the Resurrection. Our own faith in the Resurrection is not based on experiencing Jesus' presence, but on an empty tomb. Now comes a time when we must live the resurrection. That is not always easy. There are days when we might prefer to just stay in bed, pull the covers over our head, and close out the world. Some days it seems easier and safer to lock the doors of our house and avoid the circumstances and people of our lives. Sometimes we just want to run away, hide, and not deal with the reality of our lives.

No matter how prepared we think we are, we are never quite prepared for the shock of resurrection. It reveals God's satisfaction in the Son and his mission. It proves that Jesus' way of living is eternal and enduring, and that death cannot prevent God's purposes from coming about.

Nobody goes to a tomb expecting it to be empty. We go for other reasons - to pay our last respects; to remember the dead; to display one final act of love...our grief for the loss of the loved one.

The mood then was dark, with no hope of lifting up. The disciples knew what we all know too well – dead people remain dead. It was easy for the disciples to believe in Jesus when they felt the magnetism of His words, when they witnessed His healings, when they saw His miracles. But it was much harder for them to believe after He had been condemned to death and still harder for them to believe when they realized that they also could be killed for having been His followers.

Thomas gets a bad rap in this story. He doubted the Resurrection because he had suffered the crisis of the crucifixion. His faith waned, and like the other chosen disciples, Thomas ran and hid. He was not be found on Golgotha. He was too afraid to remember the promises of Jesus...but so did they all!

It is Easter evening, the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, the day they saw the empty tomb, the day Mary Magdalene announced, "I have seen the Lord." The disciples are gathered in the house - the doors locked out of fear. A week later they are in the same place. It is the same house, the same walls, the same closed doors, the same locks. Nothing much had changed.

Jesus' tomb is open and empty but the disciples' house is closed - the doors locked tight. The house has become their tomb. The disciples are bound in fear, separated from the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Their doors of faith have been closed and they have shut their eyes to the reality that life is now different. The locked doors have become the stone sealing their tomb.

What was the last thing they did before the arrest of Jesus? They fled and denied knowing him, even though each of them had said they would be willing to die for Jesus. They are still not willing to die for Jesus. They are hiding and they are terrified. They know Jesus is dead. They know that his body has gone from the tomb but they have no understanding as to what this might mean.

I think they believe what Mary first tells them, that the body has been taken away and they don't know where they have put him. Mary has since told them that she has seen the Lord but this just makes no sense to them. It is in this context that the Risen Jesus appears to the disciples. What's the first thing Jesus says to the disciples? Not 'Where were you?' or 'You abandoned me?' He says, 'peace be with you'.

And he says 'peace be with you' again. Then he says 'I send you.' This is a group of frightened men hiding in a locked room who don't even understand what has happened to Jesus. And in that state, he tells them that he is sending them – there's no sense that they need to pass some kind of test first before they get sent out: they're ready now. Jesus says 'as the Father has sent me so I send you.' And He breathes on them.

Jesus knew what the disciples needed to hear and see and touch, just like he knows exactly what we need. In this first appearance in the locked room he shows the disciples his hands and his side, to show them he is not a ghost but real and can be touched. Thomas isn't there and so he is afraid that the disciples have just been seeing things, that they've had some kind of hallucination. He makes the perfectly reasonable statement that he wants to touch Jesus in the very spot where the nails went in. He has to be sure it's the same Jesus: that he's not a ghost and neither is he just a man that looks like Jesus.

These are the same questions we might have. Surely they were just seeing things, the mind when going through grief can do strange things. Surely it was just wishful thinking? Or maybe a man did come into the room but it was just someone that looked a lot like Jesus? It can't actually be that man we lived with for 3 years and saw brutally killed.

Jesus, when he appears to them all again, it's in a closed room and again, the first thing he says to them is 'peace be with you'. In doing this he is saying 'I meant it you know, I really do forgive you, you really are still my friends, peace be with you'.

Then he immediately knows what Thomas needs and offers him the chance to touch the place where the nails were in his hands and feel where the lance pierced his side. Jesus is happy to show him how real he is. This is enough for Thomas, we don't

even know if he takes Jesus up on the offer to put his finger in his wounds, he simply makes the first full profession of faith in the divinity of Christ in the Gospel and says 'my Lord and my God'. Thomas' faith was restored, but Jesus told Thomas about a greater faith, a faith that calls us. Jesus knows we need something tangible to keep him alive and real. He gave us the Eucharist to remind us of that each week. We can touch and taste and receive him in the bread and the wine at the very altar in front of us.

Jesus is always entering the locked places of our lives. He comes in - unexpected, uninvited, and sometimes even unwanted. He steps into our closed lives, closed hearts, closed minds, and standing among us he offers peace and breathes new life into us. He doesn't open the door for us but he gives us all we need to open our doors to a new life, a new creation, a new way of being. This happens all the time.

At the end of this encounter with Thomas, Jesus speaks directly to us. If this were a movie rather than a book, this would be the part where Jesus' head turns from Thomas and looks directly down the camera lens and says 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

He is speaking now to you and me. Jesus steps out of this story we are reading and directly into our lives. His story is our story; our story is his story. He comes to us in our fearful, dead, inadequate, failing state and says 'peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit, you are blessed because you believe in me.'

(excerpts from Fr Michael K Marsh & Byrony Taylor)

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