

This Sunday's Texts:

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 1:1—2:2

John 20:19-31

The Resurrection Continues

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The Gospel reading for this morning is found in John, chapter 20, verses 19 through 31 and I'll be reading from the New Living Translation:

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin) was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and I place my hand into the wound in his side." Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you see me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus

is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

The word of the Lord. Good morning! The passage that was read earlier will be my sermon text this morning.

Today's sermon is entitled, "The Resurrection Continues." Last Sunday, our church, alongside millions of believers around the world, celebrated the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith. Because of the Resurrection, we now have reconciliation with God. Because of the Resurrection, we now have eternal life through him. Because of the Resurrection, we can experience victory in our day-to-day sin. Scripture says that the power that rose Jesus from the dead is the one that lives in us. So we have the Holy Spirit to fight sin because of the resurrection of Jesus. And this is good news!

On Easter morning, Mary and some other women went to the tomb and they found the tomb empty. And then of course Mary encounters Jesus and she is so excited. Like every Christian should do when we encounter Jesus, she goes and she tells someone. She goes to the disciples and she tells them, "I have seen Jesus!" What happens is John and Peter run over to the tomb and they see the empty tomb. They see the clothes where Jesus had folded them.

Then their next response is always something that kind of baffles me. So if I know Jesus is not there and Mary had seen him and talked to him, I think my response would be to go "let's go find Jesus!" Right? "Let's go get the other disciples and let's go find him." They had been together with him for three years, so they knew his habits, they knew where he would go spend time with God. Perhaps they could go and find him. But their response was, together with the other disciples, to go into a room and lock the door.

They were hiding. The Scripture today says that they were hiding because of fear of the Jewish leaders' reprisal, which is true. They had been connected with Jesus for three years. They were identified with Jesus. It makes sense for them to think they went after Jesus, so now they're coming after us next.

But I think there was more to that. I think that they were not only hiding from the Jewish leaders, but they could have also been hiding from Jesus. Maybe they were just hiding and thinking we're just going to wait until this whole thing blows over and we can go back to life as normal. They were hiding and they were stuck behind a closed door. Because, think about it, most of the disciples, with the exception of John, had abandoned Jesus. When Jesus was in his hour of need, when he was experiencing the most horrific way to die, they abandoned Jesus. They were only concerned about their own well-being and they left him. And then, think about Peter. Peter flat-out denied Jesus. Three times, he said, "I do not know him." So there had to be some guilt. There had to be some shame that they let Jesus down. And so there they were, hiding, behind a locked door.

I think if we're honest, we can identify with the disciples at this point. Because how many of us either go right directly into sin or maybe don't do something that we know Jesus wants us to do. Instead of dealing with it, we hide. When we have the consequence of our sin, what we might think is "You know I'm going to go and clean myself up. I'm going to take care of this sin and when I've taken care of it, then I'll return to worship, then I'll return to community, then I'll start reading my Bible again."

This is a lie because we cannot clean ourselves up. We need the saving power of grace that is found because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We can't do it ourselves, but yet we hide. Or we come to God and we say, "God, you can have this part of my life, but you can't have that part. You know that secret sin that no one knows about. No, you can't have that. That's too messy, God. That's too much baggage and so we hide from God.

But what I love about what Jesus does is the doors can't keep him out and Jesus comes in. And what does Jesus say? He doesn't say "What are you doing hiding here? We have a world to change. Let's go!" He doesn't say that. Or, "You call yourselves my disciples? You're awful! You abandon me! You gave up on me!" He doesn't say that either.

Instead, he says the beautiful phrase, the beautiful words of "Peace be with you." Peace be with you and in that phrase, he's communicating. He's communicating forgiveness to them. He's communicating reconciliation. He's communicating "We're okay. Let's move on." Peace be with you.

And then he does something amazing. What he does as he breathes life into them, he breathes the Holy Spirit and he breathes life into them again. What's he doing is he's taking us back to the book of Genesis. He is taking us back to the beginning where Adam and Eve also try to hide from God. Right? Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They brought sin into this world and their response like ours as well is they hid. They hid from God. And in their shame and in their nakedness, they tried to cover it up on their own. They've tried to cover their nakedness with sewing fig leaves together and they tried to hide amongst the trees. And God called them out, "where are you?" Because we can't hide from God, church.

Then Jesus also takes his back to Genesis 2, where Adam's body was newly formed from the dust of the ground. God had his lifeless body, he breathed breath into it, and Adam began to live. In John 20, Jesus does the same thing. He breathes life into the disciples and they begin to live anew.

This morning, Church, I want to address this issue. Perhaps you find yourself dealing with shame from your past sin. Perhaps you have stuffed the shame down and your response is to hide. Your response maybe was "Let's just hide and let's not come to worship. Or let's hide from community. Or I'm not going to read my Bible." My encouragement to you is today that you would stop hiding. Today would be the day that you would bring your shame, that you would bring your guilt and you will lay it down at the foot of the cross and in exchange, that you would receive his grace and his mercy and his

forgiveness for you. And that you would receive that and that you would begin to live anew. That is my hope and that is my encouragement for you today. To stop running and to stop hiding, but to come before Jesus, to be real, and to lay that guilt down and receive instead his forgiveness.

The disciples were so excited. They were so excited because they encountered Jesus. And so Thomas came back. Thomas wasn't in the room at that time. We don't know where Thomas was. Maybe he was out getting dinner. Maybe he was out being a spy. But he wasn't there. So he comes back and the disciples are so filled with joy that they say "Thomas, we have seen Jesus!" Thomas says those words, those famous words that brought in variety to him. He says, "Unless I see. Unless I see with my own eyes. Unless I'm able to touch the marks where the nails were imprinted in his hands. Unless I'm able to touch his side where the spear pierced his side, I will not believe." Because he said those words, he has been forever dubbed as Doubting Thomas. You and I, we use that phrase all the time. If someone shows doubt or showing someone cynicism, we might say "you're just a Doubting Thomas." But the good news is his doubt was only the beginning. The good news is he didn't stay Doubting Thomas. He transforms to "Confessing Thomas." When he saw Jesus and he said those words, "My Lord and my God," the doubt was just a starting point.

Here's the good news, Church. The good news is doubt in itself is not absence from God. Did you hear that? Doubt in itself does not mean absence from God. It's just a starting place. Doubt can be a tool that God can use to move us forward. God can use that tool of doubt to birth into us something new.

When I was growing up, I grew up in a church that didn't encourage doubt at all, didn't encourage questions. In fact, if you had any doubts or questions, you learned very early on to keep those to yourself because you are most likely ridiculed or shamed for it. So when I became a Youth Minister, it was my desire that we would have a space where students would come and they would come with their questions and with their doubts and that we would address them. So every church that I am part of or

every club site that I go to with my work at Youth for Christ, I have this little box that I bring. It's the question box. We put it in the back of the room and every time a student has a question, they anonymously would put their question in that box. Every six weeks or so, we would pull those questions out and we would address them. We would sit down usually in a circle. We would have our Bibles out. We will look at culture and we look at contents and we look at what Jesus is saying, not what we think we want it to say. And we look at the questions and we wrestle and we do what scripture says to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. We wrestle. I remember one time one of my youth leaders came up to me afterward and she whispered to me that question that you talked about today that was my question. I had held on to that question for so long. I didn't know what to do with it because I was embarrassed to bring it into an adult Bible study. I didn't know what to do with it.

And so my encouragement to you today, Church, if you have doubts, if you have questions, is to keep knocking, keep pushing, keep seeking, keep asking. Scripture says that we will find him if we seek him earnestly with our whole heart. Keep looking.

Maybe some of you are in high school and you look at what the Bible says in the biblical principles and you look at culture and you say how do I live?! How do I live in this culture that is clearly contrary to the word of God? How do I live? To be honest, there are times where I look at Scripture and I think I don't want to do that. That's too hard. Right? I look at Jesus' words where he says to forgive those who have hurt us, who have harmed us and I don't want to do that. But I, like the rest of us, can't pick and choose what I like and what I don't like. I ask you to keep looking and he will reveal and he will show you who he is.

Or perhaps you are young adults and you are in college and you're taking a philosophy class and, again, you don't know how do I merge this with my faith. Keep pressing. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.

But please, I admonish you, do not allow those doubts to build a wall between you and God and your faith community. Do not walk away, but keep pressing in. That's my encouragement to you today.

Do you know the end of the story of Thomas? So Thomas actually became an apostle to the people of India. He shared the gospel with them there. Thomas was murdered. Soldiers ran into him with spears. He was martyred for his faith. Thomas believed in the resurrection of Jesus and it transformed his life and he was forever changed. It just took him a little longer to get there. Like it does for most of us because we all have our starting point whether you were baptized as a young child, whether stood here in front of this church and confessed your faith. We all have our times we may struggle and doubt, but again, keep pressing in, keep seeking, and keep knocking. That's my encouragement to you this morning.

I believe in a church this size that there are probably three different types of people, whether you are here in person, or you're watching online, or perhaps a friend gave you this sermon to listen to. Perhaps you, like I was saying at the beginning, have been struggling with shame. Some sin from your past has kept you stuck and has not allowed you to move forward into the journey that God has for you. I encourage you that today would be the day that you would lay that doubt, that shame down, that you will lay that sin down and again, in exchange receive Jesus' mercy and forgiveness. Because again, we cannot do this on our own. We cannot clean up our sins. It's only through the power and saving grace through Jesus is how we can deal with our sin. So I encourage you to do that today and again if you have doubts, please, please do not walk away. Please come and share those with your church family. There are many of us that would love to be honored to walk alongside you. Not only the pastors, but the staff and there are many Christians, seasoned Christians in this congregation that would love to walk alongside you and say this is how I dealt with my philosophy class when I was in college. This is how I navigated being a single Christian in the dating world that is clearly against the way the world does

things. This is how I did it. This is how I push through these questions and now I'm on the other side. So I encourage you to come and to be part of this community, to continue to walk.

And the rest of us. Let us be people that would love those that are in the midst of their sin. Let us love those that come here that are still struggling with addiction, still struggling with the struggle of their sin. Let us show grace and love and gentleness to them. Let us show kindness, as we point them to Jesus. Let us be people that would patiently show the Word to people that are struggling with doubt and walk through with them. Because we are all on a different journey in our walk with Jesus. My encouragement to us this morning is that we would link arms together and we would walk this journey together. Amen? Amen.

Let us pray. Dear God, we need you. We need your mercy. We need your grace. We need your forgiveness that covers our shame, our sin, the things that keep us stuck from moving forward. Oh God, we, together, corporately come before you and say Lord, show Mercy on us. We thank you for what was done on the cross. We thank you for the Resurrection power that allows us to move forward with your grace and your mercy and fights sin. We thank you for those truths. We thank you, God, because you are near to those who draw near to you. You show kindness and gentleness to us when we have our questions and we have our doubts. So, God, would you reveal yourself to those who have doubts this morning. Would you push through their walls, through their questions, so that they can see you, not who the world says you are, but who you are. So, Lord, I ask that for the people this morning and together may we walk in love and kindness and show a world that desperately needs you that we are your children and we are changed and transformed by the power of the Resurrection. We ask all of this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.