

Sermon for The Second Sunday of Easter

Date: April 28, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Acts 5:12-32

Second Reading: Revelation 1:4-18

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31

Sermon Text: John 20:19-31

Sermon Title: The 'Doubt' Prison



Introit: Psalm 105:1-5; Antiphon Psalm 1 Peter 2:2-3

Hymns:

LSB 549 – All hail the Power of Jesus Name

LSB 472 – These Things Did Thomas Count as Real

LSB 477 – Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven (v.1,3)

LSB 469 – Christ the Lord is Risen Today

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Prayer and Preaching



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: John 20:19-31

On Sunday evening [*the same day He rose from the dead*], the disciples were together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews. Jesus stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you!” When he said this he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were glad to see the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me so I am sending you.” After he had said this he breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven. Whenever you don’t forgive them they are not forgiven.”

Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who was called Didymus [*meaning the twin*], was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

Thomas told them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my fingers into them, and put my hand into his side I will never believe.”

The next Sunday Jesus’ disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked Jesus stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to Thomas, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen me and believe.”

Jesus performed many other miracles that his disciples saw. Those miracles are not written in this book, but these miracles have been written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so that you will have life by believing in him.

NOTE: Copyright information.

Bible Translation: GOD’S WORD®, © 1995 God’s Word to the Nations. Some readings have been adapted to better reflect the original Greek or Hebrew.

Credit for Images:

Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

© 2019 James Groleau.

Permission is granted to use these sermons for any non-profit purpose. I only ask that credit, as to their origination, be noted appropriately.

Grace to you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever been in a situation that, if only for a short time, paralyzed you with fear? Maybe it was when a doctor's visit brought a diagnosis of serious illness; a report that comes back with cancer or some other ailment. You might wonder how you're going to tell your friends or your family. You may even feel like you don't know what to do or say. For perhaps a few moments, maybe longer, you just don't know what to do.

In our reading from Acts today we see that kind of situation for eleven men. They had followed Jesus, supported Him and learned from Him. Jesus was their best friend and teacher. Then, with what appeared to be no warning, Jesus was dead and the Temple Authority was hunting them all down like dogs to kill them, just like they killed Jesus. They were paralyzed with fear. They were hiding in a house with all the doors and windows shut and locked. Every time they heard footsteps outside they wondered if they had been found.

No one is able to think clearly. No one is stepping up to lead. They are all hiding. Thomas had stepped out, perhaps to get some food for the group, but not much else is happening. Then, with no warning, no door or window opened, Jesus is standing in the room. His first words are, "Peace be with you."¹ I suppose those words had two meanings. The first was to calm them from the obvious startling jolt they all received when Jesus just appeared in front of them. The other meaning was perhaps to calm their fears; to help them understand they are not abandoned, they are not alone in the world.

I think what is most strange about this scene is that Jesus told them over and over again that He would die and then rise again on the third day. He told them that several times just the previous week. Still they were all lost in the fear that now He was gone forever. They all doubted Jesus. They doubted God and now they were doubting themselves as well.

All that doubt was sin. Sin is the thing that separates us from God. Sin is the thing that imprisons us in bars of our own making, that never let us go. The disciples that day were locked up in a room with all the doors and windows shut. They were also locked up in their own doubt, insecurity and fear. That is why Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you." Jesus was freeing them from that prison they had made.

Were the fears of the disciples legitimate? Sure they were. I bet all of us here would have been just as concerned. They had only days ago witnessed Jesus being

1 John 20:19

executed in the most horrible and gruesome way. The Temple Authority was out to get them, to kill them the same way. You'd be afraid too! If they could take out Jesus, what would stop them from getting you?

Those fears, however, would have been unfounded. They had no reason to fear, and neither do we. Jesus was not taken out. Jesus took Himself out. He died voluntarily to save you. No one defeated Him.² He defeated all of sin, all of Satan, all of the staining filth that kept you from God. Besides that, He was not dead. He was risen. Here now, for the first time, He is showing himself to the ten disciples present. He is showing them that He is not a ghost, but physical and real. He shows them His hands and His side. By this evidence they will know beyond all doubt this is Jesus who was crucified.

By all of this Jesus frees them from their prison and gives them the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Listen to His words,

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven. Whenever you don't forgive them they are not forgiven.³

In the Lutheran church we call this the Office of the Keys. The right and authority to forgive sins.

They had been set free and also given the power to set other free. They were given the power of the Holy Spirit, but they resisted all of that. They were still filled with doubt and fear when Jesus left. A week later they are still locked up in that house with all of the doors and windows shut. They have not yet begun to enjoy their freedom, but instead chose to remain in their homemade prison, even after they have been set free.

This time all eleven are present. (You understand there are only eleven now because Judas has hanged himself. His prison sadly will never end.) Thomas is present with them this time. During the week they all told Thomas that Jesus was alive, but Thomas would not step out of the cage he had built for himself. He refused to believe. In English we use the word 'doubt' but the Greek word is far stronger than that. Thomas had no faith. Thomas had utterly walked away from God. Thomas didn't believe in anything anymore.

You need to understand that is a big jump for Thomas. It was just three weeks earlier, in John chapter 11, that Jesus needs to go back to an area where people

2 John 10:18

3 John 20:21,32

wanted to kill Him. The other disciples try to talk Jesus out of going but Jesus said He must go. It was Thomas who said, “Let us go so that we too can die with Jesus.”⁴ Thomas was the strong one. Thomas was the faithful one. Now however Thomas has denied his faith, and his Lord.

Jesus had first appeared to them the previous Sunday. Now it is Sunday again. This time Thomas is there too. Again Jesus miraculously appears without opening a door or window, all of which were locked due to their prison of fear. Again Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” Then Jesus presents Himself as evidence to Thomas.

Thomas does not return to faith easily. He inspects Jesus carefully. He examines the wounds to be sure it really is Jesus. Finally, his heart is cracked, his bitterness is weakened, his doubt is pushed away. Thomas says, “My Lord and my God!”⁵ Thomas has returned to the fold and all of Heaven rejoiced.⁶ Jesus, no doubt glad that Thomas has not been lost, still chides him a bit.⁷ He doesn’t let Thomas off too easy, but Thomas too is now free.

Thomas is free the same way you were set free. Like Thomas, and the other disciples, however, we do not always live like one who has been set free. We sometimes remain in that self-built prison. You should know that the disciples still did not leave that room after Jesus second visit. They stayed there, cooped up and scared to go outside. It would be several days before Peter would muster up the courage to go to his boat and do some fishing.

We are just like them, aren’t we? We have been set free from our sins and still we allow them to plague us and pester us. Satan, a name that means ‘Accuser,’ whispers accusations in our ear with words like, “You know what you’ve done. You are not really forgiven. You still have to earn God’s love.” Lies! Lies all of it!

You might think, “You don’t know what I’ve done. You don’t know the life I’ve led.” You might be right, I don’t know. I don’t but God does, and it is God who has set you free in spite of what you’ve done. He has set you free the same way He set me, and everyone else here, free. Fellow sinners, we are forgiven.

We know this truth, “Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This demonstrates God’s love for us.”⁸ Our salvation has nothing to do with our effort. Our salvation has nothing to do with our work.⁹ Our salvation is all about Jesus.

4 John 11:16

5 John 20:28

6 Luke 15:7

7 John 20:29

8 Romans 5:8

9 Ephesians 2:9

Jesus presence, Jesus effort, and Jesus work. Jesus, being God, therefore being perfect, did that work for us perfectly.

Perfectly did everything and anything that needed to be done. We were at one time destined for the prison made for Satan.¹⁰ That prison was never meant to hold us. It was never made for us or any human being. That prison is called Hell and it was meant only for Satan and his demons. We have been acquitted of all wrong doing. We will never see the inside of that prison because Jesus has made it so.

It is you, and only you, that can now send you to that horrible place. It is you, and only you, that can lock you up inside those gates that will never open again. It is you, and only you, who can build those walls that trap you forever away from the God who loves you, and the Church that cares for you.

You, like the disciples, are free. We should not wallow in that guilt and struggle any more. The question is will we? Will we still have doubts? Will we still do things we should not do? Will we still confine ourselves within walls called sin? Yes, sadly the answer is yes we will. That is why Martin Luther said we must, each day, drown our sins in the waters of our Holy Baptism. Because sin is all around us. Satan is always tempting us.

The world will threaten us with all kinds of fear. It will throw its worst at us. The world's worst is death. We however, know something that the world does not. Jesus has conquered death. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?¹¹

I'll tell you where it is. It is nowhere. It has no power over you, because you are free, and what Jesus sets free is free forever.¹² That is the message we teach here. The message of the Easter promise. That is the message we take outside these walls to everyone out there. They all need to hear it. They all need to know the prison doors are wide open. We are all free to walk out into the open air; to walk down that narrow road to a place called Heaven.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

10 Matthew 25:41

11 1 Corinthians 15:55

12 John 8:36