

April 11, 2021

Gospel reading - John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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It's the second Sunday in Easter, and the reading is always the same. "Doubting Thomas." I'll usually make a big deal out of the doubting part... that it's OK to have doubts... If these doubts worry you, take heart, because it means you believe. Our fallen human nature is skeptical. That's not always bad. For instance, I know that my truck is not "alive." I don't really think there is a spirit in my truck. But still, I try not to talk about selling my truck and buying a new one, anywhere near where my truck can hear me. I wouldn't want it to feel bad about what I was planning and start acting up on me out of revenge. I know that's totally ridiculous. I know it. But it doesn't stop me from having just enough doubt to avoid it if I don't have to... Doubts are weird.

By here's why that illustration just came up in a conversation yesterday. Pastor Campbell is doing his doctorate in Missiology. He has a paper due on Animism, the belief that trees and rocks and whatnot have souls. Nature worship. He made the

comment that we don't run into much of that these days. And I said, "Oh, I think we do, we just don't think of it as organized. For instance... and I used my truck as an example. And he hadn't thought about it that way, But we are all probably animistic to one degree or another. It's the taint of sin.

But you can certainly understand why this reading would be appropriate here, on the week after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Because it was a doubtable event. Whoever has heard of someone rising from the dead... not just as some story, but in actuality? Especially back then.

Today with modern medicine, people have been resuscitated from what they call being "clinically dead." Bodily functions cease for a brief period. Heart stops, circulation stops, breathing stops. Brain activity stops. Ischemic damage to bodily tissues onsets very quickly. For the brain, the limit seems to be about three minutes. Other tissues, a bit longer. Hypothermia can extend these times, but 20 to 30 minutes seems to be the limit for restoration of life support. These are unusual, and most successful resuscitations need to happen in the first 2-3 minutes, in order for there to be good recovery. Notice I said "good" not "full".

These are referred to as resuscitation and not resurrection. The first is to restore the operating systems. Bring them back on line. The second is literally to stand up again.

To quote Max the miracle worker from "The Princess Bride"....

"Whoo-hoo-hoo, look who knows so much. It just so happens that your friend here is only MOSTLY dead. There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive. With all dead, well, with all dead there's usually only one thing you can do. Go through his clothes and look for loose change."

But even today we can't bring back the dead. Resuscitation, maybe... resurrection... unheard of.

Yet, Jesus' disciples witnessed at least ONE. They saw Lazarus be raised from the dead. Called out of the tomb after 4 days. That was a concern even for those gathered, because, "By now he stinketh." He was well beyond resuscitation; He had been all dead and then some. On top of which, on at least three occasions, Jesus had told his disciples he would not only be put to death but he would also rise again from the dead.

So I'm not sure why this would have come as a big surprise... but it did. We have the benefit of hindsight, so I'm not going to give them a hard time about, especially our

friend Thomas who is praised highly by Jesus, and who also says these important words...

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe." And Thomas replied, "**My Lord and My God.**"

That is also our confession. It is the Confession of the whole Christian Church on earth...

Or... may it isn't.

Beware the world we live in these days. Hear these words I will read to you from Paul's letter of encouragement to Timothy, a young pastor dealing with a culture very much like our own today...

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage with every form of patient instruction.

For the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires. So they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

A popular leftist activist and social commentator recently wrote of the Celebration of Easter, saying in effect that Christians worship the resurrection of Jesus today. And that it's not really all that important for Christians to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He asserts that half of all Christians are in doubt of that story. Then he comforts them by saying it doesn't actually matter if Jesus rose from the dead anyway. All that's really important is to be inspired by the life Jesus lived. And be imitators of Jesus by doing as he commanded his disciples, and feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and immigrants and give clothing and health care to the poor.

In other words, he says, if Christians want to go to heaven, it's not important to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. If you want to go to heaven, just be nice and kind to each other, and back our social agenda.

It's worth re-reading Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, especially these verses.

For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith. In that case, we are also exposed as false witnesses about God. For we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead, but He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If our hope in Christ is for this life alone, we are to be pitied more than all men.

EASTER is most important. What do we do when the popular voices of today are advocating that it doesn't matter if Jesus was raised from the dead? Or that what is important is that you are not a jerk.

I admit that it is important to bear the fruits of the Spirit -- Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, Goodness, Patience, Gentleness, Faithfulness and Self-Control. To live in this world with those as our attitudes, make it bearable to be here. Without those fruits, it would be unlivable.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

There is a world to come. A world that transcends death. We live beyond THIS life. THIS world is temporary. The life to come is eternal. Where we spend that eternity has been guaranteed to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is central to our confession.

I believe ... in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

This is our confession, And if we want to be real about our faith, then we ought to engage it with the fruits of the Spirit being evident in our lives. Because as the scripture says...

WE LOVE... because HE first LOVED US.

Our confession could easily include...SEE HOW HE LOVES US.... This is what He did for you and for me.

AMEN