

The holy gospel according to John...**Glory to you, O Lord**

Gospel: John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The gospel of the Lord...**Praise to you, O Christ**

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

There is a lot packed into this gospel lesson. We have doubting Thomas, we have the sending of the Holy Spirit, the office of the keys... Any one of these topics would be a good direction to go.

This is one of those scripture lessons we read every year. And for some reason I have a very narrow way of seeing it. But this past week, something changed for me. I read a commentary that opened my eyes to see this text a little differently.

I always imagined that what Thomas was doubting, was that Jesus had risen from the dead. And while that's an important part of it, it also goes much deeper.

One of the things that this text emphasizes, is that Thomas needs to see the marks of the crucifixion. Thomas wants to see the holes in Jesus' hands... Thomas wants to put **his** hand in Jesus side, where he was pierced. Thomas wants to see and touch the marks of the crucifixion...

What Thomas seems to doubt, is not only that Jesus was raised from the dead, but that Jesus was raised from the dead after being crucified. The reason this is important, is because Jesus didn't die a natural death. Jesus was killed, and the way Jesus died, deepens our understanding of the resurrection. They are connected...

In the world of the first century, the prevailing theology was that blessings and curses were connected to God's will. Remember the disciples asking Jesus, "Who sinned that this man was born blind?" They just assumed the blindness was God's will, and a consequence of sin.

Likewise, being crucified meant that God had turned His back on you. In the passion story, people mocked Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God, command your angels to come and save you." In other words, the prevailing theology would suggest that Jesus was a fraud—exactly because he was crucified.

So, Thomas not only doubted that Jesus was raised from the dead, Thomas doubted that God would raise a person who was crucified from the dead. So, when Thomas wants proof that Jesus was crucified, Thomas is confronted with a whole new way of thinking about God.

And by raising this crucified victim from the dead, the message is that Jesus was not a fraud. But rather, it was the participants in the crucifixion that were the frauds... And in this crucifixion story, we would have all done the same thing! In other words, we all have Jesus blood on our hands.

Now imagine this group of disciples, they were in lock down... They were keeping their social distance from the rest of the world. They were literally afraid for their lives... And this was the same group of people who promised Jesus they would never abandon him. And in truth they folded big time. They were the original betrayers the deniers...

Peter was the bravest, he followed from a distance. But even he would run when push came to shove. These disciples were not only afraid; they were feeling guilty and ashamed of their own inadequacy. They were wimps and they knew it...

And three times, Jesus says peace be with you. Jesus appears to them as a forgiving presence. Not as a crucified, and “**where were you**” kind of presence, but as a crucified and forgiving presence. You see, this is just the opposite of what you might expect. And for Thomas this changes the whole equation about God... God is not about rendering death and punishment; God is fundamentally about life and forgiveness!

Exactly like Jesus offering forgiveness to the soldiers who are nailing him to the cross, “Father forgive, for they know not what they do.”

Thomas needs to see Jesus’ hands and touch his side... Thomas is riddled with guilt and shame... And in that very poignant moment, Thomas confesses "My Lord and My God." This is the confession of a man who knows he's been forgiven to his core. In his doubt that Jesus could ever forgive him, he encounters a crucified person who forgives him. He encounters his Savior.

This story of crucifixion and resurrection goes right to the heart of our life-giving God. God extends His forgiveness, so we can learn to forgive each other.

This is a story of God bringing forgiveness into the lives of people who were locked up, fearful, and full of guilt and shame. Perhaps not so much different, than in our current situation.

These are tense times we are currently living through. And I’ve seen a lot of miracles. People doing what people do best and taking care of one another. And every single one of those stories inspires me. But the truth is, we are all getting a little more tired and frustrated, and all the time...

Speaking for myself, I’m tired of going shopping and wondering if I’ll get sick. I’m tired of worrying about my kids and my parents. I’m really tired of the politics! I’m tired of not knowing how long this is going to go. I’m tired of staying home. And I’m a little ashamed to admit I feel this way. But it is the truth... I’m just sayin...

I’m also really tired of grieving... I feel sorry for people who’ve lost their jobs, their businesses, this world is so different... my heart is broken... It’s going to take a long time to get through all this... And that makes me sad...

We are all living under a lot of pressure and a lot of grief. And we are all coping with it differently. And it’s exactly in times like these, we need Jesus. We need that forgiving presence.

Perhaps now more than ever. The good news today is that Jesus is raised from being crucified. As Jesus forgives the people who crucified him, we can forgive those who crucify us. And in that forgiveness is the power of life.

And so, as we move into yet another week, without any end in sight, let us be mindful of being loving, kind and gracious. You have been forgiven, exactly for the sake of the world. As Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

We all need each other, and as the Body of Christ, we might feel like we've been crucified... But we are also people of the resurrection, a forgiving presence. We forgive as we have been forgiven. And in that way, we rise from the dead. And with Thomas, we can only exclaim, "My Lord, and my God."

Amen ...

Let us sing verses 1,3 and 4 of When I survey the Wondrous Cross...