

# Sermon for Easter 2 Year B

## The Text: John 20:19-31

Humans are suspicious creatures. We don't immediately believe everything new thing we hear. We measure it against what we know to be true. We evaluate it by what we have experienced. We ask questions. Does it sound possible? Is it logical? Ultimately, we like to see this new thing for ourselves, get our hands on it and check it out.

Those who visited Jesus' tomb three days after His burial could not believe what they saw and what they heard.

Early on that first Easter Day, Mary Magdalene saw the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb and immediately went and told Peter and John that Jesus' body was gone. That was new. No one had heard of the dead coming alive before. Peter and John are shocked and they run to the tomb to see this new thing for themselves. What were they to make of this strange sight? After all the pain and grief of Jesus' torturous death, now His body is missing.

Peter and John went to their homes. Mary went back to the tomb. Back to the last place she knew Jesus to be. And there, the risen Lord Jesus revealed Himself to be alive. His body was not been stolen. He was not missing. Jesus is alive and that was the new message Mary takes to the disciples. But they did not believe Mary's words (see Mk 16:11).

The disciples are suspicious. They cannot believe that Jesus is alive. They probably didn't know what to believe, given that it is not common place for people to just come back from the dead. Sadly though, they didn't trust Mary's words, even though she spoke the truth, and her words fitted with what Jesus had told them many times. The only way they would believe is if they could see and touch Jesus for themselves.

Why were their hearts so hard? Was God's Word so far from them they could not believe Jesus is risen from the dead? Was their grief so great that they could not recall Christ's own words fore-warning of the events of those three days past? We might criticize the disciples for their dullness in not putting together the words of Jesus and the events of His death and open tomb. But we do so to our judgement, for we are not so great at trusting His promises and keeping His Word.

Later that day, in the evening, the disciples gather behind locked doors. They were no doubt discussing all that had taken place that day. They were afraid that the Jews might now be after them, so they locked the door. Huddling together in fear and confusion Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you."

Peace is what they lacked. Those men were frightened for their lives, confused at what Mary's words could mean, overwhelmed with guilt for deserting Jesus, afraid what would happen next, uncertain what they were to do. Jesus comes and gives them what they lack.

Before they can say or do anything, Jesus speaks. He is not there to condemn or seek revenge for abandoning Him. Jesus came to grant them the deep abiding peace of God. He has not deserted them, but comes to show them that He is alive and that He lives to grant peace to forgive their sins. He is there to take away the barrier that exists between them and God.

By coming to them in the evening, Jesus has given them time to act according to faith. He was giving them opportunity to trust in His words and understand that He was not dead, or missing, but raised from death to life. They failed to trust in the Word. They couldn't see hand of God at work bringing about the salvation of sinners. So, Jesus comes to show them that their sins have been atoned for.

He shows them His hands and His side. He invites them to touch Him, to feel the wounds by which they have been redeemed. Hearing the Good News that Jesus was alive they did not believe it. But in seeing Him for themselves and touching their risen Lord, they believe. Mary's words make sense. Jesus words about "rising again" make sense. He needed to die and be raised to life to bring God's plan of salvation into reality. They were understanding in new ways, who Jesus truly is and what He came to do. He is the flesh and blood God come to save the world through dying and rising again.

But one of the Twelve, Thomas, was not there, and when the others told him about Jesus' appearing among them in the flesh, like them, he did not believe. In fact, Thomas made this firm vow, "Unless I see in His hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe."

One week later, Thomas got the opportunity to make good on his vow. The apostles again gathered behind locked doors and Christ came and stood among them, to again bestow peace upon them. He invited Thomas to touch and feel and believe that He is indeed alive. Thomas saw, he believed, and he confessed Christ as his Lord and God.

What about us? We don't get a chance to see and touch and believe? We can't place our finger into the wounds of Christ. What we do have is just as sure. We have the word of those who saw and believed. We trust in the witness of Mary, Peter, Thomas and the other apostles. We learn from Thomas that the witness of others can be relied on. We get to hear and believe. Listen to those who saw and confessed Jesus to be alive, to be the Lord. They are faithful witnesses. Their words are true, and with eyes of faith we confess Christ Jesus crucified and risen for our salvation.

This ultimate Good News of Jesus conquering sin and death brings us peace. Christ's words grant us peace and forgiveness just as He forgave the apostles. And He comes to us in His Supper to speak His peace to us and grant us His peace in bread and wine.

The words of Jesus are preserved in the liturgy of the Sacrament. After the Words of Institution, the pastor proclaims to us, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." Jesus is our peace with the Father. His forgiveness is the peace we enjoy. He invites us to the feast of peace—His body and blood—so that we would know without doubt that we have the peace of God. Jesus places His flesh and blood in our bodies to make us holy as He is holy.

God calls us to faith on the basis of His Word, on the witness of Mary and the apostles. We are those of whom Christ spoke when He said, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed".

We are blessed with faith to see that Jesus is our flesh and blood Saviour. He has overcome sin and death for us. He gives the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to trust in Christ. We meet Him in His own words, in the washing of Baptism, in His own Supper. He comes to give us life, His life.

And it doesn't matter what we have done, Jesus comes to forgive us. He forgave the disciples that abandoned Him, and denied even knowing Him. He forgave the apostles for doubting Him to accomplish salvation through His cross and resurrection. If they are forgiven, then we are forgiven too. John says as much when he says of his gospel account; 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.

We all have a doubting Thomas lurking deep inside, a part of us that struggles to believe what Christ's resurrection means for us personally. When we have doubts about it all being true, or if sin prevents you from believing that Christ died even for us, don't try and go to the cross in your thoughts. He is no longer there. Go where Christ is found and where He desires you seek Him: in His Word, in the promises of Baptism, in the feast of Eucharist, in His words that grant us forgiveness and life.

God's Word is given to us as an anchor in the storms of life, as an immovable rock on which we stand against the temptations of the flesh, the doubts in our mind and this non-believing world. Christ is our life, and He gives His life through the physical means of His Word and Sacrament. Get into the Word, receive the Sacrament in faith for the strengthening of our body and our salvation.

We are in Christ and He is in us. As the bearers of Christ's body and blood we are His words of grace to those burdened with sin. We are God's touch of compassion to those who hurt. We are witnesses to the power of Jesus' cross and resurrection. Our neighbours meet Jesus in our words and actions, in the way we live differently from everyone else.

Jesus is alive, risen from the grave to give us His forgiveness and life through His Word and Sacraments. Christ has defeated death, hell and sin, and He gives the gift of life and salvation freely to all who believe and are baptized. Amen.