

Sermon John 20 19 31 2nd S of Easter 2011

Sermon: 2nd Sunday of Easter

Text: John 20:19-31

Theme: We are blessed people!

Goal: To show how blessed we are by God as people who believe in the resurrected Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: My cousin and I organized a Family Reunion some years ago. The short history of my family is that my grandfather immigrated from Ukraine to Brazil in 1912 with seven little children. Three of them died in the first four weeks. The other four survivals grew up and formed their families. Two aunts moved to another state and we had never met those cousins. Some have moved to another country. We contacted them and invited all of them to the reunion. And many of them came. It was a nice festival!

My grandfather died in 1918, six years after he had moved to Brazil. My grandmother died when I was one year old, and the four siblings had passed away at the time we organized the reunion. Only cousins and second cousins were at the reunion. None of us present at the reunion had ever seen the grandfather. Neither had we any picture of him. But we still have his Bible, with some personal notes in it and the family tree handwritten by him; we have his passport and some other documents in Russian and in German; and *we* were there, his descendants! Nobody had any doubt about the existence of grandfather Winterle, in spite of that nobody had ever seen him. And we were blessed to be together and alive as his descendants. If he had not immigrated to Brazil, none of us would be alive; because the relatives who remained in Ukraine were all killed in the communist regime.

Nobody has any doubt about the existence of grandpa Winterle, - even you now! There are lots of evidences, and we, the Winterles, are here!

I – We didn't see Jesus – and are blessed!

Why am I telling you this personal story of my family? Because I would like to relate it to the Gospel of this Sunday. No one of us have ever seen Jesus. Nobody of our century has ever seen Jesus. Many don't believe in Him. Many accept that He was a great man, but don't believe that He rose from the death! Many don't accept the reports we have about Him in the Gospel. They are like Thomas, who wanted to see and to touch Jesus to believe.

But Jesus says: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!” We are blessed people when we believe in the resurrected Jesus! - even when we have never seen Him!

There are lots of evidences and documents about Jesus. We have the Gospels, which survived about two thousands years, in spite of many attempts to suppress them and to destroy them. The message of the Gospels are still relevant, while other books and documents of that time or even older are nothing but archeological documents. The Gospels and/or the entire Bible is the biggest bestseller in the world! But many don't believe in it's report and don't believe in Jesus.

Jesus says: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!” We are blessed people when we believe in the resurrected Jesus! - even when we have never seen Him!

We Christians are here, as Jesus' family in the 21st century, as Jesus' followers. This is a proof that something very important happened in the past that caused the formation of this big Christian family all around the world! We still come together every Sunday like a family reunion to celebrate that Jesus rose from the death on a Sunday and to join Him in His Word and in the Sacrament. We as Christians are a living evidence that Jesus is alive and he is among us.

But, as someone wrote, *“for those who don't believe, any proof is not enough; for those who believe, no proof is necessary”*.

Jesus says: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!” We are blessed people when we believe in the resurrected Jesus! - even when we have never seen Him!

II – Thomas didn't see Jesus, - and he doubt.

We cannot condemn Thomas because he wanted to see the resurrected Jesus to believe in Him. He is a good representative of all of us, who like to see, to touch, and to have a concrete proof about things. Jesus is merciful and gave a second chance to Thomas.

Thomas was missing the service on Easter Sunday. He was not with the other disciples as they were together, afraid of the Jews, but excited about the news that the women had shared with them. The women had seen the resurrected Lord early in the morning! Now, it was evening. And Jesus appeared to them, giving them a message of peace and forgiveness. “They were overjoyed when they saw the Lord!” And they shared this good news with Thomas as soon as they met him: “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas lost the opportunity to see the resurrected Lord on the First Sunday of Easter because he was not with the other disciples. I don't know where Thomas was; but he missed this big event! *“For a week Thomas continued in his unbelief, in his unsettled mind. Only the assurance of Christ's resurrection gave him that peace, to which he responded with, My Lord and my God!”* (LCMS- A).

III – Jesus shows Himself in the Word and in the Sacrament.

Jesus is merciful to us as well and He is still coming to help us in our doubts and weaknesses. He knows that we like to see and to touch. He is with us according to His promise in His Word and in His Sacrament, the very body and very blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given and shed for us for forgiveness of our sins. We sing after the Lord's Supper: “My eyes have seen Your salvation...” Do we believe it? Blessed are we!

Thomas didn't know that Jesus was to come on that evening to the meeting of the disciples. But we know that Jesus comes to us every Sunday, at 09:30am, here at St. Thomas Church. He comes with His blessings of forgiveness in the absolution, as He gave His power to the church: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” This is the Office of the Keys, and the pastor forgives your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. - Do you believe it? Blessed are you if you do!

Jesus comes with His peace every time we greet each other in the liturgy with the words: *“The Lord be with you – And with your spirit”*; because where the Lord is, there is peace.- Do you believe it? Blessed are you!

We share the Peace of the Lord just before we come to the Communion: *“The peace of the Lord be with you always!”* This means that we are in peace with the Lord and in peace with each other. And we come to the Communion in peace... and we are dismissed in peace after we have received the body and the blood: *“Go in peace!”*, says the pastor. - Do you believe it? Blessed are you!

And Jesus gives His peace again at the very end of the Service, when we receive the blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you.. and give you peace.” This is not just a wish, but a concrete reality. God promised when He ordained to bless His people with these words: “So they (the priests) will put my name on them and I will bless them” (Num 6:27). - Do you believe it? Blessed are you!

Please, my brothers and sisters, don't miss the service without a very big reason. Don't miss God's blessings as Thomas missed them on the first Easter Sunday. It's for your good, - and you are blessed people of God because you have not seen the resurrected Christ, but you believe!

Conclusion: Faith is the key to receive the blessings of the resurrected Christ. John concludes his Gospel saying: “Jesus did many other

miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples (eyewitnesses), which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name!” Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle - Cape Town, 01 May 2011