

Sermon John 20 19 31 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter 1 Year Series

Sermon: Second Sunday of Easter

Text: John 20:19-31 (v. 27b): "Stop doubting and believe."

Theme: Faith

Goal: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Dear Friends in the Resurrected Christ,

Introduction: How would you define faith? Can we say faith means to acknowledge what is in the Bible? To believe that Jesus died and rose again? Or to trust in God above all things? We can approach faith from different angles. I like a definition I read: *Faith is ... much more like that little child resting in her father's arms than it is book knowledge and facts about Jesus and the Bible.* (Phil Brandt, p. 4)

Among the fruits of faith are these two, among others: peace and joy, as St. Paul writes in the Galatians (5:22), and as it appears in our text. And our text adds one more: life.

I - Fruits of faith: peace

The disciples were lacking PEACE since Maundy Thursday when Jesus was arrested. And even on Easter Sunday, after receiving the witness of the women who had seen Jesus early in the morning, "they were all together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews". They thought they would be the next to be arrested and crucified and they were upset and nervous. Their faith was in the lowest level, and their hearts were full of doubts. They were not at peace.

Therefore, when Jesus appeared to them, the first words He said were: "Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands and side." It was not any peace that Jesus was sharing with them. It was the peace that flows from his perforated hands and side. He was not proclaiming peace between the disciples and the leaders of the Jews, their enemies. They would cause

lots of problems to the disciples through open persecution. But He was sharing peace with God that He had just conquered by His crucifixion and His resurrection.

I quote from the Meditation booklet, Wednesday last week: *"It is finished"* (John 19:30). *That's what creditors in Bible times stamped on a debtor's close accounts. By bringing Jesus to life, the Father was putting His stamp on Jesus' sacrifice: the book is closed on our sins"* (April 19, 2017). No debts, no fear; but Peace with God.

And that peace flows from a forgiven heart to be shared with the entire world. Jesus repeats His greetings: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with this he breathed on them and said, 'Received the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" The forgiveness and peace that Jesus conquered on the cross are now given to the disciples to be shared with everyone. And this is the main goal of the Christian Church: To proclaim and to share peace and forgiveness. Of course, the church has many other aims as well; but if this main goal is not accomplished, the church is just one more group of people in a society that tries to solve its problems and lacks peace by its own efforts, without Jesus and His sacrifice.

Thomas lacked this peace for a long week. He had missed the Easter Service. He didn't believe in the witness of the disciples and of the women. He was blind in his frustration about Jesus, and he even challenged his colleagues and God when he said: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it!"

Thomas, Thomas of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: You don't know what you miss when you don't come to a Service! You miss to see Jesus in the Sacraments and to listen to His words of forgiveness and

peace! What can be more important than that on a Sunday morning? Everything else can wait or can be done another day; but this is the time we come together with our fears and anguishes, with our sins and doubts, and Jesus comes to be among us in His Word and in the Holy Sacraments. It is not because our church is named after the name 'St. Thomas' that we should follow his bad example and miss the services. Think about this next time when you stay at home on Sunday morning...

II - Fruits of faith: joy

The second fruit of faith I want to highlight is JOY. "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." The women were overjoyed when they saw the living Christ. The disciples of Emmaus were overjoyed when they saw Jesus breaking the bread. And Thomas was overjoyed and full of holy fear when he kneeled before Jesus and said: "My Lord and my God!"

When we believe in Jesus and trust in His forgiveness, we are not only at peace with God, but we are also overjoyed with God's grace and love. Even if we are suffering due to some illness or some personal problems, but our inner being has joy in the Lord; as Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:4): "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it gain: Rejoice!"

Someone asked me why we call the sad and dark day that Jesus was crucified "GOOD Friday". I answered: because it was good for us. "By his wounds we were healed", wrote the prophet (Isaiah 53:5b). Therefore Jesus showed His wounds to the disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday, and also again to Thomas a week later. It is good for us to meditate on His suffering and death, and to see His wounds, because they are the assurance that "it is finished" and that we can rejoice in our Saviour.

### III - Fruits of faith: life

When John wrote his Gospel, his goal was not just to give a record of what Jesus had done. John had a very specific goal when he wrote down some signs Jesus had performed. John wrote: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, 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.” LIFE! Not death. LIFE! not condemnation. LIFE! By faith in Jesus, the Son of God.

Thomas almost lost eternal life because he doubted and didn't believe in the witness of the other apostles. We don't see Jesus with our physical eyes as the disciples saw Him on Easter Sunday and during the 40 days after Easter till He went up to the Father on Ascension Day. But we are called “Blessed” by Jesus because we “have not seen and yet have believed” in the witness of the Apostles written in the Bible. Thomas got life again when Jesus appeared to him, giving him a second chance to believe. We have life and are blessed because we believe in the crucified and resurrected Jesus and we trust in His promises of forgiveness and of eternal life. When we are tempted, we have to recall Jesus's words to Thomas: “Stop doubting and believe.”

Conclusion: As a good Lutheran tradition, we conclude all our sermons quoting Paul to the Philippians <sup>(4:7)</sup>: “And the peace of God, which passes all our understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We cannot understand with our reason Jesus' resurrection and lots of other things that happened to Him. But we believe it. And that faith produces in us the true PEACE, JOY, and LIFE that only God can give us through the victory of Jesus on the cross. Amen.