

*P Christ is risen!*  
*C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today our Gospel lesson is set in Easter evening, Jesus Christ is risen at dawn and it is now evening and there are disciples who are afraid of the world as they know it and have locked themselves in a room. And we as a church, for the most part, like the locked-up group in our Gospel lesson, look out from our locked rooms for fear of what our culture has become. We too lock ourselves away from a culture that we claim to be morally, ethically, and politically in ruin. We then assume that *if only* they had more religion, if only they would put prayer back in school, or if only they would read the Bible instead of those other books, it would be so much better out there. If only...if only...

If only they had more faith out there. We look out there and say, if only they had more faith out there but faith the size of a mustard seed is all that is needed, because we know more faith is foolish, either you have faith or you don't. Do we really know...in here...how much faith is out there?

If only they brought back school prayer. But have we taught our children to pray? I can say yes some have...but...have we taught our children that they can pray within themselves any time they feel the need to do so. Have we as parents taught them that they can close their eyes, or take a moment in their mind without any physical posturing and pray?

If only they would read the Bible...I think we would all rather our kids read about rape, murder, incest, drunkenness, and homosexuality in the Bible than any of those books in the libraries.

My point with this is we look to the church and our faith to cure the ills of our culture, but we lock our faith up in the darkness of our assumptions about who we are and about who they are. Our doors may NOT be locked here but our assumptions are. Here we are, looking out there at all the moral and political ruin and thinking...if only...if only...if only they could be locked up in here with us. We can all do more with our faith out there instead of in here. If only we can see that we are just like them out there but regardless of who they are or who we are, God loves us and has come among us and given Himself to us and for us and has saved us from ourselves...if only we could all see this...but if only there was some way to break the locks so all may know this...I doubt there is a way.

I think it is safe to say that if I were to ask what today's Gospel lesson is about, I think for the most part, we would say it's about "Doubting Thomas." Just like two Sundays from now, the Fourth Sunday of the Eastertide is entitled "Good Shepherd Sunday" so should the second Sunday of the Eastertide be called Doubting Thomas Sunday...because the very first Sunday after Easter is always this story about Thomas and his doubt. At our Tuesday Bible study, I asked this very question...what is the Gospel about? And yes, some said Thomas and his doubt, but in different ways within the group it came down to doubt and being sent out. And when looking at the commissioning or the sending and the doubt, it might help us to doubt what we assume we will find out there when we do go. So it is the doubt of Thomas and the sending or

the commissioning that I want to address today. But before we look at the doubt, it might help us to understand there is doubt in the wake of such wonderful news about the risen Christ.

When facing that doubt...it might help us all to remember that telling others about Jesus was not good enough for Thomas, and it might not be good enough for others as well. It might help us also to remember that same thing about Thomas and ask ourselves, was preaching about Jesus good enough for us...did we need more? Do we doubt at times? And before we become critical of Thomas, let's look at the whole picture before us today in this Gospel lesson...we just might find a better conclusion to the "if only" syllogism that at times confronts our faith.

I want to stress these words again from St. John's Epistle that was read earlier:

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

What John is telling us is that we are no better than anyone out there or in here. We are the same as those in the locked room. In other words, we are the same as those out there. However, we know that the light of the Risen Lord has and will free us from our sin but have we shared that grace out there? We are still sinners but we know that there is grace upon grace for us just same as there is grace upon grace for them that we lock ourselves safely away from...as the Gospel reminds us:

When 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, (*or the unbelievers*)<sup>1</sup> Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19)

Once again, evening or darkness in the Gospel of John is a symbol or an indication of evil or unbelief. Perhaps we can say that it was evening more by the darkness of grief, the grief that all those gathered felt at the loss of Jesus. Nevertheless, the report of the resurrection has given some slight glimmer of hope, however the light of Jesus Christ has yet to shine into the locked room.<sup>2</sup>

What then do we say when it is evening in our grief, or what do we say when the grief and sorrow of tragedy darkens our life or our faith? Do we doubt? What is said in that darkness to us that enlightens our hearts that are heavy with sorrow and grief? What light can be shed on a grandmother whose five-month-old granddaughter has just been murdered by an out-of-control father? Her anger, her hurt, and her grief and sorrow have locked her so deeply into a very dark room of not just doubt but sheer disbelief. The only glimmer of light that could be seen in that moment was that her anger was directed at God...and her anger became the one dim source of light that she directed at God as she cried about her anger toward God at the death of her grandbaby. Through her doubt about God, she was still able to direct her anger at God.

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<sup>1</sup> The "unbeliever" is my emphasis on John's use of the term "Jew" at times meaning an unbeliever.

<sup>2</sup> Joel C. Elowsky, Editor, Thomas C. Oden, General Editor. *Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture, New Testament IVb, John 11-21*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2007. Section, 20:19-20 Jesus Appears To His Disciples, "An Evening More By Grief Than By Time, Peter Chrysologus, page 355.

Looking at the details of our Gospel lesson we don't know what disciple was present nor do we even know who was present in that locked room, we just know it was evening on the first day of the week...Sunday...and Jesus came and stood among them. And we hear that He said:

"Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, *so I send you.*" <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:19b-23)

We then hear that they told Thomas and then Thomas says the words that will forever label him:

"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." (John 20:25b)

This of course is a wonderful image that allows us to see that Jesus Christ is present in that doubt. I could say herein is our Good News...Christ is with us in our doubt...but I think that is very obvious. And yes, it is very Good News. However, it is the next line that I really want us to look closer at.

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.  
(John 20:26)

The point that I am attempting to make is this; on the first evening of the first day of the week following resurrection disciples are gathered, except Thomas. And very quietly, very suddenly, they are at once each aware of the Lord's presence. Jesus breathes on them; he gives of himself to them. In that, He gives to them his peace. He also shows them his hands and his side. AND THEN, He gives them more; He gives them a mission — as the Father sent him, so now he sends those gathered in that room. He breathes on them and grants to them his Holy Spirit. He gives to them the power to forgive as they have been forgiven...Jesus Christ himself commissions them to undo sin...the power TO GO out there and forgive as they have been forgiven! And they do not...they remain locked in that room.

We too have been given the Holy Spirit...we pray fervently and regularly...

Forgive us our sins as we forgive *those who sin against us.*

In the waters of our very Baptism we know that the minister marks us with the sign of the cross on our foreheads and says:

child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are good to go...but do we? Then a lighted candle was given to us and again, we are commissioned by that very light to:

Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Have we shared the light of grace, or are we still locked safely in our gathering? In and through the very waters of our Baptism Jesus Christ breaths on us and says, "Peace be with you." In our Baptism, Jesus Christ gives to us the power to forgive and in and through those waters we too are

forgiven...in and through those waters Jesus Christ himself commissions each one of us GO and undo sin...TO GO and forgive as we have been forgiven...and in so many ways we can ask ourselves...

If we've been sent How come we Ain't went?

Before we look at the darkness of the culture out there and say, "If only," perhaps we ought to look at ourselves, sitting in here, locked up in the fear of our own faith...fear that our faith will be darkened by the world when we ourselves are doubting...we ourselves are casting darkness with our hypocritical assumptions of what is out there. Perhaps it might serve us well to NOT assume the light... but the darkness that we cast by our own sin of hypocrisy and self-righteousness or the darkness of our judgment of others.

During Holy Week, our lessons have taken us from betrayal to the doubt and hesitation today...by these examples presented to us throughout the lessons, maybe just maybe there is a light that has shone in our hearts to say to each one of us...if only that was just a story...but it's not...it is my faith that I keep locked up in the darkness of my safekeeping.

Today, within this very room, through this Holy Word and in this Holy Meal is the very blessed presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, giving to each of us a foretaste of the feast to come. We are blessed in this Holy Meal to take Christ into our hands and into our hearts through his body and blood in the form of bread and wine...and from this very Word the Lord's peace is given to us and we too are sent, NOT just to tell of the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen indeed...but we are commission to forgive as we have been forgiven...we are sent with the very advocate who is with the Father, who is Jesus Christ the righteous one who makes us all righteous. May all come to know that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not just for our sin only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe...this is the benediction of our Risen Lord, it is meant for us, and with and through us, it is meant for the whole world. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*