

**Easter Sunday
(2021)
John 20:19-29
“And There Was Jesus”**

Introduction

Jesus said, ‘Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ **John 20:29**

Happy Easter! Today is the most sacred day of our faith. For it was on that first Easter morning that Jesus proved once and for all that He was exactly Who He claimed to be. He was the lamb of God sent to pay the price for all our sins. And His resurrection proclaims His final victory over death. And because He rose, we that have placed our faith in Him also have the guarantee of salvation and eternal life.

If you confess with you mouth, ‘Jesus is LORD’, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **Romans 10:9**

That verse never gets old does it? It tells us that we are saved by faith when we surrender our lives to Christ as LORD, and He proved that He was LORD by His resurrection. As I once heard someone say, Jesus paid my debt on the cross, but at the Resurrection, the check cleared! I LOVE that statement, because it is so very true. Anyone can die, but it takes God to raise someone from the dead. And that is exactly Who Jesus is... GOD! This reality is laid to rest all throughout the Gospel of John, but in my humble opinion, it is made most clear in the passage about the man we have all come to know and love as “Doubting Thomas”. And today, we will take a closer look at His resurrection encounter with the risen LORD. I’ll be completely honest with you this morning, sometimes I too am a doubter. And frankly, I also doubt that I am the only one who sometimes struggles with doubt in this place today. Can I get a witness?

The story of Thomas, who was also called “*Didymus*” (both names mean “*twin*,” one in Aramaic and one in Greek), is about a guy who was brutally honest. He never pretended to buy into things that he did not believe. What you saw was what you got with ol’ Thomas. I wonder if that is why Jesus chose him in the first place. Thomas was the guy in the room who always asked the questions that were on everyone else’s mind, but they were all afraid to ask them. The night before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples that He would soon be going away, but not to worry, they knew the way to where He was going. It was Thomas who spoke up and said:

...We don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way? **John 14:5b**

Now, I for one am so glad that he asked that question, because The LORD’S reply is one of the greatest verses in all of scripture.

Jesus told him, ‘I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you know Me, you will also know My Father. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.’ **John 14:6-7**

Wow! Thank you Thomas for asking that question. As you can see, Thomas was a man who needed to have things explained to him so that he could get with the program. And actually there isn’t anything wrong with that. Thomas was also fiercely loyal to Christ. He was the one who was willing to go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus when all the other disciples were shaking in their sandals at the mere suggestion (**John 11:16**). It is not for lack of devotion that Thomas doubted the other’s stories of Christ’s resurrection, it was just his personality, that he needed to see it for himself. Jesus made two Sunday appearances to assure His disciples AND Thomas that He had risen from the dead as the Scriptures had foretold. I would like to look today at those two “Sunday meetings” and see what the risen Christ had to

say to those frightened men and to us today as well. He brought them a message of **Consolation** and **Conciliation**, a **Commission**, and the **Confidence** they needed to do His will.

Consolation and Conciliation (vs. 19-20)

When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw The LORD.

John 20:19-20

There are many things that we should notice in these verses. First, the disciples had gathered together on that first Easter Sunday evening. More than likely, a meeting was called due to Mary Magdalene's report that she had seen The LORD (**John 20:18**). The Jews, prior to the Resurrection, had observed Saturday as their most holy day of the week. But after Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday became officially known as "The LORD'S Day", and the church has observed it ever since as a day of gathering together to worship. God created the earth in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. Jesus spent six hours on the cross to usher in His new creation, which began on that first Easter Sunday. The resurrection was an event that brought about a new "Genesis" (a word which means beginning or origin).

The second thing that is important to notice is that the disciples had locked themselves inside the house. They were afraid that what had befallen their Master could also be visited upon them. Jerusalem was in a state of upheaval due to the execution of Jesus, and it was hard to know whom a person could trust. The disciples (all but one of them) had decided that it was worth the risk to get together to discuss what Mary had said. Her story had not been believed by them at first (**Luke 24:11**), but after Peter and John ran to the tomb to have a look for themselves, they had begun to take her words a bit more seriously.

I just love the personal touches of the Gospels. John, who was very young at the time, wanted his readers to understand that he had outrun the older disciple in the race to the tomb. So much so, that he mentions it twice in his narrative (**John 20:4,8**). It would seem that these guys competed in just about everything! They had often argued amongst themselves as to who was Jesus' favorite. And here they are bragging about who won the resurrection marathon! I'm so thankful that Jesus saves regular folks with lots of personal flaws. Can I get a witness?

These imperfect, fearful, and doubtful men had abandoned Jesus, when He had most needed their support. And yet, on the evening of that first resurrection day, Jesus goes to them. I can only imagine the shock they must have felt, when He suddenly appeared in their midst! No doubt, they were all fully engaged in a conversation that was quite intense. And as they were trying to decide whether or not if they believed their Master had indeed risen from the dead, they looked up, and THERE WAS JESUS! It takes a lot more than a locked door to keep Jesus out of a room and out of the discourse. This world has tried to shut Him out for centuries, but one day He will appear and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of The Father (**Philippians 2:10-11**).

I would have loved to have seen the looks on their faces when He appeared to them out of thin air and said "*Shalom*" (*peace*) *be with you*". He didn't condemn them for running out on Him, but rather, He brought them a message of "peace". He was not angry with them, nor was His heavenly Father! For you see, that is the reason that He died: to bring us conciliation with The Father. Jesus is our "Conciliator", the intermediary between God and man, Who died so that we could not only have peace *with* God, but also the peace *of* God. The wrath of God over our sin has been satisfied upon the cross, and the resurrection is the proof that we who believe in Christ... will have PEACE. It is a message of both Consolation and Conciliation. It is the first word that Christ said to His disciples when He came to them, and they were overjoyed to hear it. All their fears were instantly erased in that moment. I am reminded of the great Hymn by Bill and Gloria Gaither:

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives all fear is gone.
Because I know, He holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because He lives!"*

If you know Christ this morning, then you can rest assured that you have been given peace *with* God that saves you from wrath, as well as, the perfect peace *of* God that casts out all fear. Jesus rose to give us conciliation and consolation. Oh the perfect love that Christ has shown for us by His death on the cross and resurrection. We now have nothing to fear in this world or in the world to come. As John the disciple would declare in one of his later writings to the Church, **"...perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18)**. Are you fearful and anxious this morning? Then turn your eyes upon Jesus. He is waiting to reveal Himself to you and give you peace.

Commission (vs. 21-23)

Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As The Father has sent Me, I also send you.' After saying this, He breathed on them and said, 'Receive The Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' **John 20:21-23**

A second time, The LORD speaks His peace over them, and this time it came with a commission; to go out and share the message of the cross and resurrection, so that others can also have peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. It is the commission given to every one who chooses to follow Jesus. There are no exceptions. We have been chosen by God to go and make disciples. This is the very purpose of the Church here on earth, to take the message of Christ to the lost and dying.

When Jesus gave His most famous "Sermon on The Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**), He began by explaining the various attributes that every child of God will have in common (**Matthew 5:3-12**). One of those many attributes was that God's redeemed would have both the calling and desire to become "peacemakers".

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God." **Matthew 5:9**

This is exactly what Christ is telling His disciples in **John 20:21-23**. Simply put, He is saying, "Because of My death and resurrection from the dead, you have been given peace. Now go and take that same message of peace to others. Become My peacemakers in this world." This IS the Great Commission of The Church of Jesus Christ. To go and make disciples, so that they can have peace *with* God and the peace *of* God.

The next thing He does is to "breathe" on them and tell them to receive The Holy Spirit. The words for "*spirit*" in both the Hebrew and Greek (*Ruach* and *Pneuma*, respectively) literally mean "*breath*" or "*wind*". In the beginning, when God made Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He breathed life into them. At the beginning of Christ's "New Creation", He breathes the "new life" into His disciples by giving them the indwelling Holy Spirit. This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and it happens over and over again when anyone places their faith in Christ. We become a new creation by the power of the Spirit of the Living God. Old things are passed away, and all things become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

After telling them they would receive The Holy Spirit, He lets them know that this will empower them to take the message of the gospel to the world. **Verse 23** has, over the centuries, become the source of quite a bit of controversy, but it should not be. Jesus wasn't telling His disciples that they had the power to forgive sins. Only God can do that. What He was saying was that everyone who believed their message of the gospel, empowered by The Holy Spirit, would be forgiven just as they had been forgiven. But those who would reject this message in unbelief would remain lost in their sin, and the wrath of God would remain upon them.

“Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the Name of the One and only Son of God.” **John 3:18**

Our commission is to share the gospel, so that those who believe can be saved.

Confidence (vs. 24-29)

But Thomas (called “twin”), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were telling him, ‘We’ve seen The LORD!’ But he said to them, ‘If I don’t see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand in His side, I will never believe. A week later His disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don’t be faithless, but believe.’ Thomas responded to Him, ‘My LORD and my God!’ **John 20:24-28**

Talk about what you could miss when you skip a church service! I had this very conversation just this past week with someone who told me that they used to believe that they could worship God just as good at home as they could at church. He had since learned that this is absolutely not the case. We are commanded to gather together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s not a suggestion, it’s a command. And why is that? Because amazing things happen when God’s people gather in Jesus Name! For starters, Jesus promises to show up every time it happens.

For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I AM there among them. **Matthew 18:20**

If you are one of those people who believes you don’t really “need” to go to church, you are only deceiving yourself. Look at what Thomas missed just by being absent one Sunday! One thing was for certain, he wasn’t about to miss another gathering. He wasn’t convinced that what the other disciples had said was true, but deep down how he had hoped that it was. He might have lost his confidence, but no one could question his loyalty to Jesus. He had loved Him with all his heart. Perhaps that is the reason that he could not bring himself to attend that first Easter Sunday, because the grief was more than he could bear. Which brings me to say, if you are looking for the place to share your burdens and have them lifted by the supernatural peace of Christ, the you NEED to be in CHURCH!

Thomas was a skeptic, but come to think of it, the other disciples had not believed in the resurrection when Mary Magdalene had told them either! They (with the exception John) didn’t really believe until they had seen Jesus for themselves. Isn’t it strange that we always call Thomas “Doubting Thomas”, but we give all of those other guys a pass? Sometimes our faith gets weak, and that is when Jesus comes to us in His strength. If it wasn’t for Christ, all of us would be hopelessly lost.

My favorite thing that ever happened to me in church was when a man came into my office and honestly said to me, “I’m not sure that I really believe in all this ‘Jesus stuff’ that you keep preaching about.” But he went on to say, “Would it be ok if I keep coming here anyway?” I absolutely LOVE that! And do you know what happened to him? Jesus eventually revealed Himself to that man, and he became a believer, that’s what! And that my friends is exactly what happened to Thomas. Jesus showed up at “church”... just for him... the very next Sunday! You see, the “one” always matters to Christ. That is why He described Himself as the good Shepherd, who would leave his entire flock behind in order to rescue a single lost sheep (**Matthew 18:12-13**). Jesus made a special appearance... just for Thomas. That is what love does.

The scriptures do not tell us that Thomas ever actually touched the nail prints in Jesus' hands. I like to think that the sound of His voice was all that Thomas needed to hear in order to have his faith and confidence renewed. For as *The Bible* says:

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by The Word of God.

Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

When Jesus made a special appearance just to convince Thomas, the once doubting disciple utters one of the greatest statements of faith in all of Scripture. He proclaims aloud, **"My LORD and my God!"** There is not a better verse that affirms the deity of Christ than this one. For those who would try and argue that Jesus was just a mortal man and not "The Word made flesh", as John has so eloquently stated in the first chapter of his gospel, they would've have a really hard time persuading Thomas. For he saw on that Sunday, the risen LORD of glory. Just as Jesus had told them all in the upper room the night before He was crucified, **"...The one who has seen Me has seen The Father..." (John 14:9b)**. Though he had spent nearly three years traveling around the countryside with Jesus, "Doubting Thomas" had finally *seen* Him completely for the first time, and he fell to his knees in worship as a result. Where there once was doubt, his confidence in Christ's mighty power had been forever restored.

Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

John 20:29

If you believe in Jesus Christ this morning, this blessing is for you. Do you have the confident assurance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus this Easter morning? As we gather together here in this place and in His Name, you may rest assured that He is here. And He longs to reveal Himself to you in His glory. Do you believe in the resurrection? Allow His Spirit to penetrate your heart with His Word and worship him as Thomas did, proclaiming Him to be "your LORD and your God". And find in Him, your Consolation, Conciliation, Commission, and Confidence.

And let all who truly believe say... TRUTH!!!