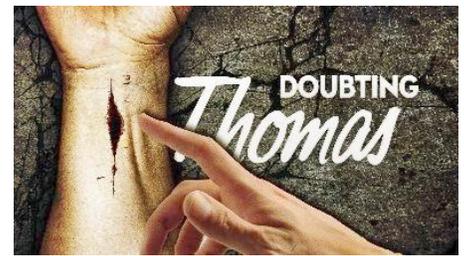


Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31



BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET BELIEVE

We may view the gospel lesson today in three parts. The first takes place in a house in Jerusalem on the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead. The second takes place eight days later in the same house. The third part explains why John wrote the gospel. The three parts are v.19-23, v.24-29, and v.30-31.

John 20:19-23. *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." ²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*¹

- ... *the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews ...* (v.19). An atmosphere of terror remained among the disciples, who were still trying to keep out of sight. From their point of view, they had barely escaped with their lives by abandoning Jesus at his arrest in the garden and fleeing from the Temple guard. His public condemnation and crucifixion only served to convince them further of their own danger as his disciples. Imagine being with them there, fearing arrest at any moment.

- *Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you"* (v.19). When Jesus speaks, there is power behind what he says – power to make it happen – especially in circumstances like this. If someone else says, "Peace be with you," it is with a note of hope mixed with uncertainty, because no person can cause another to be at peace. But if Jesus says, "Peace be with you," it is a statement of fact. Peace will be with you, because he says so – the same as when he said to the woman, "*Go in peace, and be healed of your disease*" (Mark 5:34), and the woman did in fact depart in peace, completely healed. And note that in any case, peace always comes where there is faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1 says, "*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" This verse (and many others like it) says your faith in Jesus Christ *justifies* you in the sight of God. It does not say you are *able to have peace* with God, or that you *may feel at peace* with God. It simply says you *have peace* with God. It is a statement, not about how you feel, but about the power of the cross. You *have peace with God*, because God says so. There should be no further question.

- *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit ..."* (v.21, 22). Again, there is power in these words – power to make them happen. Every person who receives Christ receives the Holy Spirit, and the fact that the Spirit was bestowed on the disciples here and again at Pentecost suggests that, in any Christian, the Spirit is felt more strongly at times according to God's purpose.

Compare the other accounts of this meeting in Mark 16:14-18 and Luke 24:36-43. What seems to be emphasized in those accounts? Does either mention the conferring of the Spirit on the disciples? What mood or atmosphere is described by each author, before and after Jesus appeared? What one or two main ideas are common to all three gospels?

After Gethsemane, the disciples would hardly have felt worthy of being "sent" in this way. How did Jesus respond to this feeling in Luke 5:5-11? How would you respond to someone who says, "I'm not a good person – why would God ever save someone like me, or make me one of his disciples?"

Compare John 20:21-22 as well as Gen 2:7, where God breathed into the Adam's nostrils "the breath of life," and "man became a living being," with the words of Jesus, "*You must be born again*" (John 3:7-9).

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

John 20:24-29. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

- “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails ...” (v.25). Why would Thomas doubt? His friends, who had been reliable for the most part, had said, “We have seen the Lord.” We all know people like Thomas. Some of our best scientists are among these, who must see and interpret the evidence for themselves.

Perhaps you are like this. You want solid evidence. Well, there is evidence of a kind. In your heart you know you are a sinner and need saving. And today, two thousand years after Thomas said, “Unless I see ...” there are uncounted millions throughout the world who will tell you Jesus Christ is risen. This is evidence.

The question is, are you willing to believe it, and by faith receive Jesus as your Savior?

- *Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you”* (v.26). There are always those who first believe, then fall back into doubt and disbelief. If you are one of these, read the parable of the lost sheep, Luke 15:3-7. Jesus will not let one of his own become lost in doubt and unbelief. If you have begun to doubt the truth of the gospel, hang around as Thomas did, and Jesus will bring you home.

- *“Put your finger here, and see my hands; ...”* (v.27). Jesus kept the marks of the nails. Seeing them, Thomas believed. When we see Jesus, those marks will be there. But they will not be there to help us believe, or even to remind us of our sins, which caused them. But they will always be there to remind us of the boundless love of God, who gave the life of his Son to free us from the bonds of sin and death.

- *“My Lord and my God!”* (v.28). There is more in this than simply believing Jesus had risen from death to life. Thomas had often called Jesus *Lord*. He had been willing to follow him. He had even been willing to risk death, returning with Jesus to Bethany: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

But the second revelation, “... and my God!” is in a class with Peter’s, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), and Paul’s revelation on the way to Damascus, which caused the citizens to be amazed and ask, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name?” (Acts 9:21). Sudden revelations like this – revelations that Jesus Christ is the Risen Son of God – are from God. The accounts of them are not exaggerations, and not uncommon. You meet people who have gone from unbelief to faith – from death to life – in an instant, and can recall the moment of their revelation throughout the rest of their lives. Isaac Watts was remembering such a moment when he wrote,

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!

This amazing grace of God – the revelation of salvation and eternal life in his risen Son – is sometimes experienced over years, and sometimes in a single moment of insight and belief, as it was to Thomas, and to many who have followed. Has God’s grace been revealed to you today?

John 20:30-31. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

John’s gospel is written in the hope that you will be among those who “have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29) and proclaim to Jesus with Thomas and all the saints, “My Lord and my God!”

There is an old saying: “A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still.” Is this you, or are you *willing* to be convinced? If you are willing, John’s gospel is for you: *written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*