

Stop Doubting and Believe What Jesus Says – John 20:19-31

- 1) He has risen from the dead
- 2) He has blessed you in unseen ways

What were you doing last Sunday night? After you got done celebrating the Lord's resurrection here in church, where did the rest of the day find you? If your day was anything like mine, I'm willing to guess that what followed the Easter worship service was almost as good as the message of Easter itself. I've noticed that Easter Sunday is like a little vacation for Christians. It's a day we set aside to get together with friends and family to continue our celebration of the empty tomb. But if you were with the disciples on the first Easter Sunday, the atmosphere would have been quite different. They had all seen the empty tomb, but only Mary Magdalene had seen the risen Jesus so far. After spending the day wondering about the empty tomb, the disciples met in a locked room for fear of the Jewish leaders and what they might do to Jesus's followers. But it was there in the locked room that the risen Lord appeared in their midst. They would know to stop doubting and believe what Jesus says. That he has risen from the dead and has blessed his children in unseen ways.

Saint John describes that first Easter evening with these words. **“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ ”** Just as death's tomb could not stop Jesus from rising to life, so a locked door could not keep out the risen Lord. And if the disciples wondered if this person pronouncing peace really was Jesus, they need only look at his hands and side. Because once they saw Jesus' wounds from the cross, they were overjoyed! It really was him! So they stopped doubting and believed what Jesus said – he has risen from the dead. With joy they told Thomas what he missed out on that first Easter night – **“We have seen the Lord!”** But words were not enough to stop Thomas' doubts. He needed physical proof before he would believe. So he famously 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.”**

Really Thomas? Must you be so graphic and demanding? Many times we give Thomas the short end of the stick. So much that if we think of Thomas in the Bible, we think of his not so flattering nickname – Doubting Thomas. But before we come down on Thomas, put yourself in his shoes. Days earlier you saw Jesus die

on a cross and placed in a tomb carved into rock. You know that the survival rate for crucifixion is 0%. Jesus really had died. And to say that not only was he alive, but that he appeared in a locked room? There's no way that could have happened! Like anybody who hears something too good to be true, Thomas doubted the good news.

Do you doubt the good Easter news because it seems too good to be true? Would you demand to see the risen Lord, wounds and all, before you believe what Jesus says? That's the reason a lot of people get hung up on Christianity. They hear the impossible Easter truths, but their doubts stop them from believing what Jesus says. The challenge I normally hear is pretty close to what Thomas demanded. *"If I could just see Jesus for myself, then I would stop doubting and believe."* While I can't read the future, I know that seeing does not automatically mean believing. Because we have a little thing in our minds called reason.

The Lord was gracious to Thomas and met his demand for proof. So a week after Easter, Thomas and the disciples were gathered together in the locked room. Again Jesus appeared and said **"Peace be with you!"** But then he shifted his attention to Thomas and gave him exactly what he demanded. **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** It's not on accident that all the attention is given to Jesus' wounds from the cross. They are proof of his love for us. As Jesus hung on the cross, those nails were the painful points of contact that kept him up on the cross. Gravity was pulling his weight down to the ground. But Jesus had more than just his body weight. He the weight of the entire world's sins upon himself. Your and my sins for whenever we've doubted what Jesus says. After he endured the entirety of God's wrath over sin, Jesus gave his spirit up and bowed his head in death. In the soldiers' rush to finish the crucifixion before the Passover, they stabbed Jesus' side with a spear to see if he was dead. And if Thomas had been there, he would have seen that water/blood mixture confirming that Jesus had died. Thomas demanded to see these same wounds. And when he saw them, he said, **"My Lord and my God!"** Thomas had stopped doubting and now believed what Jesus said.

But how does Thomas' declaration of faith – **"My Lord and my God!"** – help us in our doubts? While the Bible doesn't tell us to expect to see the risen Lord on this side of heaven, we have the same standard of truth Thomas had all those years ago. It is what Jesus says. Whether it's spoke like it was to Thomas, or written in the Bible like it is for us, what Jesus says is true. The perfect life he lived confirms

the truth he says – Jesus is the promised Savior. The wounds from the cross confirm the truth he says – he suffered God’s punishment for our sins. The empty tomb confirms the truth he says – he has risen from the dead.

So when you read the Bible and see what Jesus says, will you doubt the truth? Or will you believe the truth? Will you doubt it when Jesus says that your sins are forgiven and that he has defeated death for you because you don’t see the evidence you demand? Or will you believe what Jesus says and receive all his blessings? Jesus Christ, my Lord and your Lord, my God and your God, has given us the truth. So stop doubting it. Believe it. Jesus has paid the price for your sins and forgiven you. He has risen from the dead and conquered death for you. And believe him also when Jesus says to us, **“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Blessed not only to believe without seeing the risen Lord. But also blessed in two more ways.

Our Lord has blessed us with life in his name. Many times when we think of this life, we think of our future life in heaven. While that’s true, our life in Jesus’ name begins already while we are here on earth. The minute we call Jesus with believing hearts **“My Lord and my God”** we have gone from spiritual death to life. It’s a life where we are right with God and continually forgiven when we doubt what Jesus says. It’s a life that when Jesus says **“Peace be with you”** it’s not a new idea, but a familiar one. Because Jesus has suffered the full punishment for our sins, we are now at peace with God above. It’s a life that will not end when our hearts stop beating. While our bodies will slowly turn into dust, our souls will already be in heaven enjoying all its joys and celebrating with other Christians and our risen Lord. And then on the Last Day our bodies will be raised glorious and reunited with our souls for the rest of time. This life in Jesus’ name is a wonderful blessing and is surely ours because we can believe every word that Jesus says.

The second blessing Jesus gives us is that he sends us out into this world with the Holy Spirit. As he said on the first Easter evening, **“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you....Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** In Catechism class we call this power to forgive or not *the doctrine of the keys*. The idea is that each Christian has 2 keys. 1 is the locking key where we withhold God’s forgiveness from someone and so *lock* their sins onto them. The other is the unlocking key where we proclaim God’s forgiveness to someone and so *unlock* their sins from them. So when we tell someone *“I forgive you”* we are

essentially telling them *“I, on behalf of God, give you the benefit of Christ’s death and resurrection. Your sins have been washed away and you are holy in God’s sight.”* On the flip side, if we tell someone *“I don’t forgive you”* we are telling them *“I, on behalf of God, deny you the forgiveness of sins. You are still stained by them and God cannot stand the sight of you because of them.”*

Does that make you take a step back in reverent fear? That Jesus has given to you the keys of God’s forgiveness? Maybe that’s a good thing as you consider how powerful the message is that Jesus has sent us to tell. But before your knees start knocking as you ask yourself *“Who am I to have the keys to God’s forgiveness?”* Consider this – you will not be alone. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be with you. And since Jesus says it, don’t doubt it. Believe it. The Holy Spirit will bring the power to the words we speak. So focus your attention on sharing the news of our risen Lord. Seek the lost and get to know them so you know how to communicate Christ to them. But leave the power of your words to the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit blesses your efforts so that they call Jesus **“My Lord and my God,”** forgive them their sins and unlock them from God’s punishment. But if they remain in unbelief and entirely doubt what Jesus says, withhold God’s forgiveness from them. Not to make them suffer, but to show them their need for a Savior. And then keep telling them the good news of the risen Lord so that they may stop doubting and believe what Jesus says.

Easter is a great time of the year. Not only for the parties with families and friends or for the wonderful music church. Easter is great because Jesus left that tomb empty. We learn about that empty tomb in God’s Word which is true in everything it says. Whether it is grisly details of Jesus’ death on the cross or the blessings he gives in the locked room, when it comes to the Bible our Lord tells us – stop doubting and believe it. It is trustworthy. It tells us everything we need to have life in Jesus’ name. And it the message Jesus sends with us as we go out into the world. It is the tool that the Holy Spirit works through to create faith so others may call Jesus **“My Lord and my God.”** So stop doubting and believe what Jesus says. For he has given us these words so that we **may believe the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.** Amen.