

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 "Thomas"

Scripture: John 20:19-31, Psalm 145:13-21

Hymns: At the dawning of salvation 248, Jesus is risen from the grave 254 (1-5), Hail the day that sees Christ rise 265,  
 Sing Amen 264, Choruses: Open the eyes of my heart, You are holy (Prince of peace), What a beautiful name  
 April 8, 2018

Rev. Steve Filyk

Last Sunday I spoke about the continuity  
 Between us and those first disciples of Jesus.

Jesus spoke to them.  
 People like Mary Magdalene.  
 And Jesus speaks to us.  
 People like you and me.

Many of us can recall a time  
 When we felt God guiding us and directing us.

And many of us can recount an experience  
 Where a word from Scripture or a word from a friend or stranger  
 Was a divine word, a word from God, a word from Jesus  
 Spoken to us and for us.

Last Sunday I spoke about the continuity  
 Between us and those first disciples of Jesus.

Jesus spoke to them.  
 People like Mary Magdalene.  
 And Jesus speaks to us.  
 People like you and me.

But there is also real DIS-continuity  
 Between us and those first disciples of Jesus.

Jesus' first disciples encountered the resurrected Jesus in person.  
They stood in the same room  
or on the same road  
or in the same garden as him.

They saw the evidence of his execution:  
The marks in his hands  
And the hole in his side.

They saw the evidence of his resurrection:  
A walking, talking Jesus  
Who cooked them food  
And ate with them.<sup>i</sup>

Today's lesson from John shows us as much.

In today's lesson we have not one  
but two post-resurrection appearances.

On the evening of Easter Sunday  
The resurrected Jesus appears among the disciples  
Who had gathered behind locked doors.

Jesus greets them and offers them his hands and side.

One week later the resurrected Jesus  
appears yet again among the disciples  
Who were yet again gathered behind locked doors.

Jesus is aware that one of the Twelve  
was not present at his earlier appearance.

And that this disciple, Thomas,  
 refused to believe the testimony of the others  
 Unless he was given “personal and concrete evidence...  
 [that Jesus] had indeed been raised from the dead.”<sup>ii</sup>

“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.” Thomas declared.<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus is aware of Thomas’ doubt, his hesitancy,  
 So Jesus makes yet another appearance.  
 A week later when Thomas is with the disciples  
 Jesus shows up and offers his hands and side to him:

“Put your finger here;  
 See my hands.  
 Reach out your hand and put it into my side.  
 Stop doubting and believe.”<sup>iv</sup>

The church has been hard on Thomas  
 for demanding evidence for Jesus’ resurrection:  
 ‘doubting’ Thomas we call him.

And yet truth be told, Thomas was just asking to see for himself,  
 What all the other disciples had seen.

In the end the Gospel record doesn’t tell us  
 Whether Thomas took up Jesus’ invitation to investigate  
 Those signs of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The record simply records his climactic confession:

“My Lord and my God!”<sup>v</sup>

With this confession ‘doubting’ Thomas

“is the first person in [the Gospel of John]

to look at Jesus of Nazareth

and address the word ‘God’ directly to him.

[Thomas expresses what that Gospel

has contended from its outset]

‘In the beginning was the Word...

and the Word was God.’”<sup>vi</sup>

Today we watch Thomas being brought into the fold,

the privileged circle of early disciples

Who have encountered the resurrected Jesus in person.

And the circle is maybe bigger than you imagine.

As the Apostle Paul recounts to the church at Corinth:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day

according to the Scriptures,

and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred

of the brothers and sisters at the same time,

most of whom are still living,

though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,  
and last of all he appeared to me also,  
as to one abnormally born.”

Before his ascension

The Jesus made his resurrection known to many.

After his ascension, save a late appearance to Saint Paul,

Jesus stops making his rounds,

And lets the Spirit testify on his behalf.

I don't know about you but I often feel jealous of those early disciples.

They encountered Jesus in person,

In glowing high-definition.

During his ministry they observe  
amazing signs and wonders.

After his crucifixion

they are eyewitnesses of his glorious resurrection.

They are given a vision of what life

and life and death looks like!

Our faith is somehow less vivid,

As it is mediated by their witness.

Less like high-definition television

More like AM radio...

We hear the stories of those amazing signs and wonders.

But unlike those disciples we don't get to taste

The fish and bread that Jesus multiplied.

We hear the accounts of the resurrection  
 But unlike those disciples  
 Jesus doesn't show up in our dining room  
 Asking us to touch his hands and his side.

PAUSE

But while may not taste the fish or see the nail-holes  
 Many of us do catch glimpses of his glory.

Within those eyewitness accounts we see evidence of Jesus' divinity.

In those stories we hear about a divine courage  
 A divine compassion  
 And a divine sacrifice.

And our hearts are caught up in the wonder  
 That God sent his son "to save the world through him."<sup>vii</sup>

By the power of God's Spirit these accounts, these stories  
 have become compelling and authoritative and living witnesses.

Taking a page from our denominations' statement of belief, *Living Faith*:

The Holy Spirit gives us inner testimony  
 to the unique authority of the Bible...  
 The Scriptures are necessary, sufficient, and reliable,  
 revealing Jesus Christ, the living Word.<sup>viii</sup>

Now we may be tempted to feel like second-class believers  
 Because we haven't had the opportunity  
 To see the resurrected Jesus standing before us.  
 To touch those nail holes  
 And put our hands into his side.

And yet in God's grace and mercy  
 We are given compelling testimony  
 And hearts that are open to accept this witness.

Maybe that's why  
 after Thomas makes his climactic confession,  
 Jesus talks about us as being blessed.

Jesus says to Thomas:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed;  
 Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."<sup>ix</sup>

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

We are blessed, we have favor with God  
 Because while we don't have direct personal evidence  
 Of Jesus' death and resurrection  
 God has opened our hearts to trust  
 In the accounts that have been handed down to us.

We are blessed, we have favor with God  
 Because by trusting in their witness,  
 By believing that Jesus is our Lord and our God  
 We also "have life in his name".<sup>x</sup>

No we may not stand among the first disciples,  
 But we stand among the favored group that has followed.

Those words St. Peter later addressed to the churches in Asia Minor  
 Also speak of us:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him;  
 and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him  
 and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,  
 for you are receiving the end result of your faith,  
 the salvation of your souls.”<sup>xi</sup>

May we celebrate the faith we have been given.  
 And may we know that we are blessed!

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> See John 21 and Luke 24

<sup>ii</sup> D. A. Carson *The Gospel According to John* 656

<sup>iii</sup> John 20:25 NIV

<sup>iv</sup> John 20:27 NIV

<sup>v</sup> John 20:28 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> N.T. Wright *John Part 2: For Everyone* 152

<sup>vii</sup> John 3:17

<sup>viii</sup> “The Bible, 5.2” *Living Faith*

<sup>ix</sup> John 20:29 NIV

<sup>x</sup> John 20:31 NIV

<sup>xi</sup> 1 Peter 1:8-9 NIV