

Come and See — Faith and Doubt

John 20:19-31

Grace, peace and mercy are ours through the triune God. Amen.

Today, we pick up the story where we left off last Sunday, Easter Sunday. You may remember that the women were the first to receive the good news and then to spread it:

– Jesus is alive!

Just as he said!

And today, the story continues in the Gospel of John. Everything has changed! But has it?

The disciples are locked away together in a room.

The last time they were in this room, there were thirteen of them — now two have died and one is missing. John tells us that the doors are locked for fear of the Jews. It seems that fear, doubt, and confusion reign.

And who can blame them?

Peter and John have seen the empty tomb but not the risen Christ — anything could have happened to him.

When Jesus was laid in that tomb, there went all their hope, their vision, their sense of direction and purpose in life. They were left only with an overwhelming sense of failure, loss, and shame, because they knew they had deserted Jesus in his hour of need.

Into this fear, this confusion, Jesus appears to his disciples. His first words are a greeting of peace, peace that is sorely needed after all they have experienced in the past week. Peace that only their resurrected Lord can give them.

And not only peace, but also proof. Proof that he is who he says he is. Proof that the one whom they saw die on the cross is the same one standing amongst them. His hands and side bear witness to all that his body has suffered. It is him! And they rejoice!

And as if that wasn't enough, he has a new calling for them, for those who ran away when things got tough. He says, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' — a divine sending, a new ministry — to bring God's love and forgiveness to the rest of the world. The Greek word for *forgiveness* used here means a releasing, a dismissal — the new calling is to release people, to invite them into freedom.

And then Jesus breathes on them with the gift of the Spirit. Now we're talking! Now things are changing!

But, someone is missing. Thomas, the disciple who has always been quick and eager to follow Jesus boldly, and brave enough to ask questions when he didn't fully understand. Thomas is missing.

And the other disciples are keen to share the good news, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas needs to see for himself. So Thomas is met by Jesus, in both his doubt and his faith.

Jesus appears to the disciples once again in order to reassure Thomas — 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.'

The disciples who had lived and walked with Jesus, the ones who had watched him die and be buried, they all needed some visible sign that he was really alive again. Jesus gives it to them, as often as they need to see it, so that they might believe.

Someone is always missing, waiting to be included, then and now.

First, it was Thomas who was missing, but then Jesus appeared again so that Thomas was included. Then, in the early church, it was the next generation of believers who had not witnessed the risen Christ. They needed to hear the testimony of John and the disciples — to hear that they were blessed in their belief that came without sight of the risen Christ.

Who's missing now?

We follow on from that second generation, hearing again and again the witness of those who saw Jesus resurrected.

So, who's still missing now? Who is yet to hear of God's forgiveness and know his love? And how do we respond to the call that Jesus gave to his disciples — to make known God's love and the new life that his death and resurrection brings?

Seeing is believing
- come and see

In John's Gospel we hear that seeing is believing. John's Gospel is always inviting us to 'come and see'. In the story of Philip and Nathaniel, when Nathaniel asks Philip, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?', Philip responds 'Come and see.'

The Samaritan woman, after her encounter with Jesus at the well, rushes back to the city, saying, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!"

And now Thomas is invited to come and see Jesus'

wounds.

It's one thing to receive the call from the physical Jesus to go forth into the world, forgiving the sins of others. But what if we cannot see the physical Jesus? How do we live into this call as people who have not seen and yet believe?

Perhaps as we answer this call, it is helpful for us to engage with our own questions, our own doubts. I wonder what doubts you have?

Does it sometimes seem that, in the absence of definitive proof, all that we claim to know and believe in this Christian community might be a bit far-fetched?

- After all, rationally and scientifically, it's a pretty big ask to believe that someone could be raised from the dead.
- Do we sometimes feel so weighed down by guilt and shame that it is hard to imagine that Jesus has taken that guilt and shame and left it at the cross?
- Do we sometimes doubt that we are loved beyond measure?

What doubts do you have?

Where do we go with our doubts, our questions?

Jesus invites us, just like Thomas, to ask our questions, to seek understanding, knowing that it is in our seeking that our faith deepens. In fact, one of the definitions of theology is 'faith seeking understanding'.

As we speak our fears, our doubts, our anxieties, Jesus continues to turn up for us and with us, speaking peace and providing strength for the journey.

Faith seeking understanding

Jesus meets us:
• In his word

We meet Jesus here today, in his word. The last few verses of our Gospel reading today reveal to us John's intention for writing his Gospel.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30

Jesus, the logos, is always present and active in his word. Often in ways that I just can't get my head around until I feel the word working in me, changing me, transforming me, and challenging me. Perhaps you know this experience yourself?

We will meet the risen Christ here again next Sunday in the bread and the wine — Jesus' body broken for us that we might live. Yes, Jesus' resurrected body, but also the body that bears the scars of pain and suffering, just like our Christ figure here in the church. Brokenness that speaks to our brokenness. Love that calls us to serve, despite our brokenness.

Jesus meets us:
• In his word
• In bread and wine

Jesus meets us:
• In his word
• In bread and wine
• 'Where two or three are gathered in my name'

As we meet as a community here in worship or in other settings, Jesus is present with us as he has promised to be — 'where two or three are gathered in my name':

- As we tell and retell the Easter story,
- As we tell the stories of how God has been, and is, and will be, present in our lives.

• As we ask

our questions and voice our doubts, knowing that sometimes our faith is strong and sometimes it's a bit wobbly.

- As we wrestle with what following Jesus is actually all about —

Jesus is present.

He stands among us bringing us peace, shalom —

Jesus is present

wholeness — all that we need to strengthen our faith in difficult times. All that we need to fulfil our mission calling.

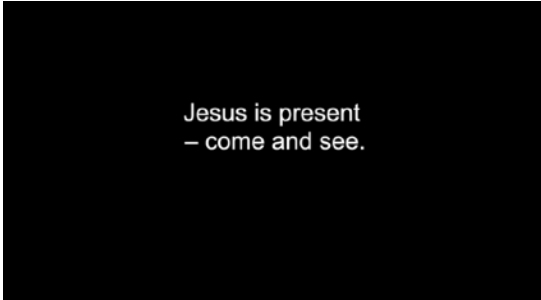
Ah yes, our mission calling. You know, one of my greatest fears about mission is that, despite the fact I have a theology degree, I won't have the answers to the questions that someone might ask me. That I might not be persuasive enough or have a strong enough faith to convince someone to believe in God.

What fears or anxieties do you have?

As we are called to leave behind our closed doors, Jesus speaks peace into our fears and anxieties. He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit as he sends us out to make known the love of God. He invites us to face our doubts and questions, and then to let go of our fears so that we can welcome whatever our future brings. Trusting that Christ is risen. Trusting that God is already waiting there, bringing what's needed for the mission conversations ahead. Trusting that God will work with us and through us. Trusting that there is no need to fear.

Trusting the invitation to 'Come and see'.

Amen.



Jesus is present
– come and see.

Video of the service including the above address: https://www.youtu.be/ZnM7_pQK4b8