

Christ meets us in our questions

Bible reference for sermon: John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

The story begins not with triumph, but with fear. The disciples are gathered behind locked doors—real doors, bolted shut. They are afraid for their lives. Jesus has been executed by the authorities, and they know they could be next. There are rumours swirling—rumours that he is alive—but those rumours don't cancel out their fear. So, they do what many of us would do: they stay inside, together, trying to make sense of what has happened.

And then, into that locked room, Jesus comes. No knocking. No dramatic entrance. He is simply there among them. And the first thing he says is not, "Why did you abandon me?" or "Why are you hiding?" He says, "Peace be with you." He says it twice, as though they need to hear it again to let it sink in.



This peace is not the absence of trouble. It is not the kind of peace that comes when everything is resolved. It is something deeper—a peace that exists in the midst of fear. It is the peace of Christ, the peace that has already passed through suffering and come out the other side. This is not the kind of "peace" imposed by power or maintained by control. It is a peace grounded in God's presence, even when the world feels unstable.

Then Jesus shows them his hands and his side. The wounds are still visible. Resurrection does not erase what has happened. The risen Christ is still the crucified Christ. The pain and injustice of the world are not denied or dismissed—they are carried, transformed, and redeemed. The worst that human systems can do does not have the final word.

At this point, the disciples move from fear to something else—not certainty, not full understanding, but joy. And immediately, Jesus gives them a purpose: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." It's a surprising move. He doesn't tell them to stay safe or keep hiding. He sends them out. These same frightened, uncertain people are now entrusted with continuing his work.

He breathes on them—a deeply symbolic act, echoing the breath of life in creation and the Spirit bringing life to what was dead. This is a moment of new creation happening right there in that locked room. And their calling is not theoretical. It is grounded in relationships, in forgiveness, in healing, in participating in God’s work of restoration in the world. In a culture that often revolves around blame, exclusion, and division, they are sent to live differently—to embody grace.

But one of them is missing.

Thomas isn’t there that first evening. And when the others tell him what has happened—“We have seen the Lord”—he doesn’t respond with easy acceptance. Instead, he says what many of us might feel but hesitate to admit: “Unless I see... unless I touch... I will not believe.”

Thomas has often been labelled as “the doubter,” but that label is a bit unfair. The other disciples also struggled to believe. They needed to see Jesus for themselves. Thomas is simply more honest about it. He names his need. He refuses to pretend that second-hand testimony is enough for him.

His honesty is important. Because so often, people are made to feel that doubt is a failure of faith, that questions are something to be hidden or overcome as quickly as possible. But in this story, doubt is not rejected—it becomes part of the journey.

A week later, the disciples are again in the house, and this time Thomas is with them. Again, the doors are shut. Again, Jesus comes and stands among them. And again, his first words are, “Peace be with you.” It’s as if nothing has changed—and yet everything has.

Then Jesus turns directly to Thomas. He doesn’t ignore him. He doesn’t criticise him. He doesn’t say, “You should have believed your friends.” Instead, he invites him: “Put your finger here... see my hands... reach out your hand...”

In other words, he is saying, “I understand what you need. And I will meet you there.”

This is a remarkable moment of grace. Thomas is not excluded for his doubt. He is not shamed or pushed aside. Instead, he is given exactly what he asked for: an encounter, a relationship, an experience of the risen Christ that is real and personal.

And Thomas responds with a profound confession: “My Lord and my God.” It is a declaration that comes not from blind belief, but from encounter. From being met in his uncertainty. From discovering that doubt does not disqualify him from faith but can actually lead him deeper into it.

Jesus then says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” This can sound like a gentle correction, but it is also a blessing—a word spoken not just to Thomas, but to all who come after. It is a word for us.

Because we are those people. We have not seen in the way the disciples did. We were not in that locked room. We did not touch the wounds. We live, in the ongoing reality of the “Sunday after Easter,” where faith is shaped by story, by community, by trust.

And yet, we are still called blessed.

Not because we have perfect certainty, but because faith is possible even here—in the absence of direct proof, in the presence of questions, in the ordinary rhythms of life.

Many people today approach faith with caution, even suspicion. There are good reasons for that. The church has not always been a place of safety or integrity. There has been harm, exclusion, and hypocrisy. And so people ask questions. They hesitate. They doubt.

But this Gospel suggests that such questioning is not a barrier to faith—it can be part of it. Faith, especially in the Gospel of John, is not simply about agreeing with a set of ideas. It is about trust. It is about relationship. It is about choosing, again and again, to walk in the way of Jesus—a way marked by compassion, justice, and love.

So, what does it mean to be the church in this kind of world?

It means we are not a community of perfect believers. We are a community shaped by grace. A community that knows fear and yet hears the words “Peace be with you.” A community that carries wounds and yet participates in healing. A community that makes space for questions, for doubt, for honest seeking.

Perhaps, in fact, the church is most faithful when it makes room for Thomas—when it creates a space where people do not have to pretend, where uncertainty is not judged, where faith can grow slowly and authentically.

The Gospel ends by reminding us why these stories are told: “These are written so that you may come to believe... and that through believing you may have life in his name.” This is not just about belief for its own sake. It is about life—full, abundant, meaningful life. Life shaped by the presence of Christ, experienced through community, through acts of love, through moments of unexpected peace.

We may not encounter Jesus in the same physical way the disciples did. But we encounter him still—in shared meals, in acts of compassion, in the quiet assurance that we are not alone, in the Spirit that continues to breathe life into weary hearts and communities. And especially in this meal that he has prepared for us today.

So here we are, on this quiet Sunday after Easter, in a world that still has its share of locked doors—fear, uncertainty, division, and pain. And into this world, into our lives, the risen Christ comes again, not with condemnation, but with a gift.

“Peace be with you.”

A peace that does not deny reality but holds it with hope. A peace that acknowledges wounds yet refuses to let them define the future. A peace that sends us out—not because we have everything figured out, but because we are loved.

And if today you find yourself more like Thomas—questioning, uncertain, needing something more—hear this clearly: Christ is not afraid of your doubt. Christ meets you in it. Christ continues to come into locked rooms, into guarded hearts, into uncertain faith, and to offer himself again and again.

And in that ongoing encounter, whether quiet or transformative, gradual or sudden, you may find yourself drawn into a deeper trust, a deeper hope, a deeper life.

“My Lord and my God.”

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>