## John 20:19-31

## When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” 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.

This past week, an acquaintance told me about a movie she had seen the day before. The movie's name, “I Can Only Imagine” is based on the song by the Christian group Mercy Me and is the true story of the transformation of a troubled relationship between a man and his father. As this woman related her experience of watching the movie, she became quite emotional and her eyes filled with tears. “It was so wonderful,” she said. She went on and on about how the movie touched her and how she was inspired by the way a badly broken relationship was healed by the power of God. “You need to go see this movie,” she told me. “You would love it.” While I appreciated the passion in this woman's words, I wasn't sold. I hadn't heard about the movie or its premise. I'm not sure if I would like it or not. It's hard to get excited about someone else's experience of a movie or a song or an event; you really have to see or hear it for yourself to believe what the person is telling you.

Thomas was not with the other disciples when the risen Jesus first appeared to them. Thomas didn't see the marks in Jesus' hands and sides. He didn't feel Jesus' breath on his cheek. He didn't hear Jesus speak. When the other disciples told Thomas about their amazing meeting with Jesus, he heard what they said. It was not necessarily so much that he doubted what the others were telling him, but Thomas was a realist. He needed to see Jesus and touch him for himself to know that the news of his resurrection was real. Thomas' head may have been processing the news but his heart was not yet on board. Sometimes it's hard to get excited by someone else's experience. You just have to have it yourself to believe.

So Jesus returned a week later to the house where the disciples were. He gave Thomas the chance to touch the places where the nails pierced his hands and the sword cut his side. Jesus spoke to Thomas and the others with the promise of peace. This is what Thomas needed in order to believe. “My Lord and my God!” Now he got what his friends were saying, what it meant for his devastation over the death of his dear friend. He understood, as much as he was able, what God was doing to restore God's relationship with God's children, to give the world a second chance. Thomas' faith was restored.

It's tempting to romanticize Jesus' appearance to Thomas and the others. Remember, they were huddled together in a locked house for fear that those who had killed Jesus would come back for them. Their encounter with Jesus didn't wipe away their fear or the heartache they were experiencing. Their beloved friend was not going to be with them every day. They would need to figure out a way to get on with life without him and to do it in a world that was still hostile to Jesus' message. But now they had seen the resurrected Jesus for themselves and they had hope for themselves and the world. They knew that the peace Jesus put in their hearts would one day wrap around the world and change it forever.

The gospel writer John does something remarkable after he tells us about Jesus' appearance to Thomas. It's as if he turns to us and tells us why he has written what he has, so that our hearts might be moved to know that Jesus is the Messiah and that he was raised not just so his first disciples might be believe in him but so we might believe and have life in his name. John is telling us that the resurrection was not just a one-time event 2000 years ago but that it keeps on happening over and over again so that the whole world will have new life. The resurrection is not just something you and I have to imagine. It is happening in our lives every day, enabling us to put yesterday behind us, to live fully in this day and look with hope to tomorrow.

We believe what John and the other gospel writers tell us, still sometimes our faith falters. Even if Thomas didn't doubt Jesus, sometimes we do. We yearn for a sign, for a sighting of Jesus, so that we might know for ourselves what others have told us. And while he may not come through locked doors to where we are huddled in fear, Jesus does appear to us in all his resurrection glory.

Jesus is here in the bread and the wine we share, his body and blood given so we may have new life. Jesus is here in the water poured over us to forgive our sins over and over again. Resurrection is around us every time a new life comes into the world. Resurrection is alive in the healing of those we love and it happens when someone we loves enters their eternal home with God. We hear resurrection each time someone tells us they will pray for us. We hear it in the words of scripture, read aloud so we can hear them as if for the first time, in the beautiful music that touches our hearts in this place. New life courses through us when someone touches us in love, in reassurance, in forgiveness, in comfort. We experience new life whenever someone speaks out in Jesus' name against injustice, when people of faith gather to decry the sins of violence or discrimination against anyone for being who God created them to be. Resurrection shines around us when we work for peace in God's world.

When John says that those who have not seen and yet believe are blessed, he is speaking of us. And while in this world we may not experience the physical presence of Jesus, we still have a vision of him, bringing his resurrection power into our lives, breathing peace upon us, bringing heaven's joys to us while we still dwell on earth, until that day when we see him face to face.

Amen.

*Easter 2B*

*April 8, 2018*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

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