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The Resurrected Jesus Changes Fear and Doubt into Peace and Faith

John 20:19-31

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¹⁹ Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

²⁶ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The Resurrected Jesus Changes Fear and Doubt into Peace and Faith

1. For the disciples and Thomas
2. For a baby and his parents
3. For you and every believer

Peace be with you all in the name of Him who once was dead and is alive forevermore.
Amen.

In the name of Him who is the resurrection and life, dear fellow believers,

“Nothing you could ever say is going to convince me otherwise.” So went the confident statement of an atheist coworker I knew in my college years. He was so sure of himself, that when it came to conversations of God and salvation, it really wasn’t a discussion in matters of truth at all, but only a matter of how long it will take before I give up.

Do you ever find that unbelievers are much more sure of themselves than Christians? Doesn’t it happen that those more often found to be fearful and doubtful are they whom we call “believers”?

So it goes. We find an atheist who says: “Nothing you could ever say is going to convince me otherwise.” Yet, at the same time there are disciples hiding behind locked doors and saying things like: “unless...”; yes, there are Christians like you and me who many times find ourselves full of fear and doubt.

Today we consider how the resurrected Jesus changes this for each of us. His risen body appears in our midst and changes fear and doubt into peace and faith.

1. For the disciples and Thomas

Here’s an interesting question for you: when did the disciples first believe? We think its an easy one. But is it? We start to search. We find them waiting for the Messiah, expecting His coming. They are called disciples; that is, they have become students of Jesus. We see them spending three years under His care, hearing His Word and following Him in His ministry, witnessing His miracles. And of course, we hear Peter’s confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Yet, here they are, hiding behind closed doors. What is going on? They have heard the testimony of Mary; they have seen the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, the linen clothes folded neatly – they’ve seen it with their own eyes. Yet here they are, hiding behind locked doors.

They need to think about themselves now. What will the Jews do to them? Surely they will think they have stolen his body. They will arrest them and do to them what they did to Jesus. We find these believers behind locked doors, filled with fear and uncertainty.

And what of Thomas. Even after Jesus appears to the other disciples, he doubts. He wasn't there. He didn't see what the other disciples have seen. Just as the others, Thomas has forgotten all that His Lord had said. And he has started to sound more like the atheist – I will believe it when I see it. “Unless...”

But the resurrected Jesus appears and everything changes. When Jesus appears, it changes things. He could have come to rebuke them, to say, “where were you?” “Where were you when I was there, on the cross?” And where do I find you now? Now that the three days have passed. After all I've taught you, all I've promised, here I find you, behind locked doors. Why do you not believe?

But He does not. His risen body comes into their midst and changes everything with a word: “peace to you.” With the care of a Shepherd He loves these fearful and doubtful sinners. He will make them a witness of His resurrection and will do so with a word and a touch. The nail holes; the spear to the side; they don't bleed but these wounds are real. These scars testify to their peace with God; He sends them in His own forgiveness with the keys to the kingdom of heaven; and His risen glory now governs all that Thomas and the disciples say and do.

“Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” The resurrected appearance casts out fear; He expels doubt; and He brings forth a confession of faith which is bold in acknowledging who this is: “My Lord and My God.”

The resurrected Christ changes fear and doubt into peace and faith.

2. For a baby and his parents

But what of those who have not seen? What of those who have not felt His nail prints, or touched his side? What of the uncertainty a baby and his parents face as a child is brought into a world dead in trespasses and sins.

I have to say that there is a bit of fear and anxiety in the birth of a child. Not only do we face all the complications that can occur in labor, but this child is born with all the complications that occur because of sin. The name Adam reminds us of where this child came from and what nature he was given in birth. It was not a divine nature. Adam was not conceived with a holy nature which stands before God in righteousness, which trusts God unwaveringly, which loves God above all things.

Adam was born with the complications of being Adam. For in that first Adam, all have died and all face the eternal consequences of sin. So this baby is born to life in fear of

death. Yes, regardless of their innocent appearance, this Adam was born of Adam, and by nature enters the kingdom of Satan. "That which is born of flesh is flesh."

It brings a parent a feeling of uncertainty – a fear and doubt about what will happen. What if Adam had died in delivery? What if he had died before baptism? What if he falls away from the faith. For all of us who have children, we worry about them, we have doubts about their future. It is enough to cause a parent to hide behind locked doors – to think that the precautions we take and the choices we make will determine the eternal destiny of this child. Yet, in the end, who is it that visits the disciples behind closed doors; who is it that watches over a baby and his parents; who brings this child from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God?

There is a second Adam. A second Adam enters our lives to make right what has gone wrong. Christ Jesus appears from the dead and breathes life into this creation. He breathes life into the water, giving baptism the power to change fear and doubt into peace and faith. He speaks a word to our Adam: "peace to you."

It is the eighth day. It is the eighth day since Adam was born. And this is the day the Lord has made. The number eight has significance in Scripture. In six days the Lord created the heavens and the earth and He rested on the Sabbath. The seventh day is the day of our Lord's rest, the day the Lord rested in the tomb from all His work. It was then the eighth day in which our Lord rose; and that number eight is the day of eternity. The seventh day is the end of all God's work and the eighth day is the first day of a new week, the first day of a new creation. This is the day the Lord has made.

Have you ever counted the number of sides on a baptismal font? There are eight. Baptism is the eighth day, the day when everything changes, and the son of Adam joins the second Adam in the day of the resurrection.

But we wonder, how can water do such wonderful things? Can it be so simple? Can baptism save? It seems too simple. Yet, it is not the water which convinces us, for the water does nothing without the word. It is the word which does this great miracle. We cannot reason an atheist into this, nor can we convince someone who rejects infant baptism that these things are so. All we can do is proclaim and cling to the promise of God – in Titus 3: "He has saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." The resurrected Lord has appeared to us today; and just because we can't see Him, doesn't mean that we cannot touch Him. For there in the water, we touch Him and He touches us. He is in the water

– not because the water is magical or some sort of special water; but because the water has been visited by His Word. And where His Word and promise are given, there God is present, breathing His Holy Spirit.

“If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven.” The keys to heaven are used today, and for this reason, a baby and his parents need not fear, need not doubt. The risen Christ has appeared in the water and washed this child from all his sins, and bestowed the eternal reign of His resurrection and kingdom upon Adam. He has been joined to the risen Christ and received the eternal consequences of the nail prints, the pierced side, and the risen body.

“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”

3. For you and every believer

In fact this is not just to Thomas and the disciples; this is not just to Adam and his parents, this is to you and every believer. For this reason every one of you who are baptized need not fear, need not doubt.

We face many questions left unanswered. In this life, there are many uncertainties. – Will I find a job? Will the bills get paid this month? Will the surgery be successful? Will I recover from this tragedy? Will I ever get married? Will I go to heaven?

Sometimes we are all like the disciples, confused by our sinful flesh, fearful in our weaknesses, doubtful in our lack of knowledge – we know Christ should rise from the dead, that He should have control over all things, that He should bring us peace, but we wonder whether He will really do these things. Do we not join the skepticism of Thomas: “Unless...” “Unless I find a job and the bills are taken care of ... Unless the surgery is successful ... Unless the Lord spares me from this or that tragedy ... Unless my life goes this way or that way... Unless ... Unless ... Unless I see, I will not believe.”

Many questions may be left unanswered, but the question of an uncertain future is not. The risen Christ has appeared. He could rebuke us – for our fear of the future; for our doubting His resurrection – but He does not.

Instead He lets us touch the water, hear the word, taste the bread and wine, and so we are gathered into the bodily presence of His resurrection – not because we see, but because we believe.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” Here is Christ – in the Word; here is Christ – in the water; here is Christ – in the absolution. Your baptism does not just happen one day of your life to be left in the past and forgotten – it is the eight day – an ever present life, a resurrection, a constant renewal of the Spirit in repentance where the old man is plunged into the grave and the new man emerges filled with peace and faith.

Gamaliel in Acts 5 was right to say: “If it of man, it will come to nothing, but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it.” We cannot overthrow the work of God. Not by our sins, not by our fear, not by our doubt. For “we have been washed, we have been sanctified, we have been justified in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our Lord.” As we read in Peter, “He has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” This hope lives, and it will not be overthrown. Every time you return to the gift of your baptism, you return to resurrected Christ, and you live in His eternal blessing.

We named Adam with two middle names after my grandfather – Lester William Schierenbeck. It was grandpa who used to say, “God doesn’t say that we will understand everything, he only asks us to believe.” There are many questions left unanswered. But one question is not: will I go to heaven? While we may be caught by fear and doubt in many areas of our life, there need be no fear or doubt about the question of the eternal outcome. But God has revealed exactly what we need to know – as John says in our text, “But these things were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

The resurrected Christ has appeared with a word and an answer: “peace to you.”

So it goes. We find an atheist who says: “Nothing you could ever say is going to convince me otherwise.” Yet, at the same time there are disciples like you and I, visited behind closed doors by the risen Lord – and even though we may not see Him, yet, we hear His Word of peace, His Spirit causes us to believe, and our life confesses just who this is: “My Lord and My God!”

Amen.