

“God’s Mercy to the Unbelieving”

Thomas wasn’t there. He didn’t see Jesus come and stand in the midst of the other disciples. He didn’t see the hands and side of Jesus. He didn’t hear Jesus speak – he didn’t receive the peace that Jesus gave when He said, “Peace be with you.”

What Thomas had seen was Jesus snatched, bound, and hustled away. Imagine all the reports that he must have heard over the past couple of days. Did Peter tell the others about his denial? Did John give a report from the cross? You can imagine the talk around town – about this Jesus who was crucified. Who knows how many for sure, but it could have been thousands that saw Jesus hanging from the cross.

Thomas knew this “fear of the Jews” – why they were hiding out – afraid that the Jewish authorities would come after them, and do to His disciples what they did to Jesus. And now, when he returns to their hiding place, Thomas hears this crazy report from the other disciples – “We have seen the Lord.”

Crazy. Impossible. Unbelievable. Thomas had not received the peace of the risen Lord – rather, he lived in doubt, uncertainty, with unsettling words, fear, and unbelief.

“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will NEVER believe.”

Such words can only come from unbelief. If Jesus were standing right there, Thomas would never had said such a thing. But Thomas is locked away in fear and unbelief.

Part of me wants to give Thomas a break. I mean, who knows what I would have done and said in his situation. But look at what God the Holy Spirit has recorded for us here in Scripture. Thomas does not believe – and he is calling the shots – making demands of the Lord God almighty. Thomas is running the show – telling God how it is be for him.

He is like the Pharisees, who in unbelief asked Jesus for a sign to prove who He was and to prove that what He taught was true. Jesus is the Lord. He is not to be told what to do. While He doesn't give the Pharisees the sign they want – He gives them the sign they need – the sign of Jonah. In due time, His resurrection will be a sign for them – showing what His Words had already taught them – that He is the Lord, the Lord of all (including death).

Or, you may recall the Rich Man and Lazarus – how the rich man ended up in hell, and Lazarus goes to heaven. The rich man wants God to send someone back to his five brothers to warn them to repent so that they don't end up in torment like him. But Jesus says, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." (St. Luke 16:31)

In each of these instances those demanding signs had heard the teaching of Jesus Christ – but they want something else, something more (something better?). At least three times Jesus had clearly told Thomas that He would be bound and taken away, crucified and die, and on the third day be raised. You have My Word. Believe what I have said!

I would have been so frustrated with the disciples by now, that when Thomas says what he says – I would have let him have it! But God is merciful – slow to anger and abounding in love. He understands our weaknesses – and He patiently bears with us.

Seeing the Resurrected Christ is a great sign. Imagine seeing this man who was so brutally beaten to death – now standing before you, alive as can be. St. Paul writes, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me." (1 Cor. 15:3ff)

The resurrected Christ appeared to many different people – even, eventually to Thomas – but He has not appeared to us. And that puts us right back into Thomas' shoes here in our text – with the temptation to make demands of God – to be like the Pharisees who demanded proof – to live in unbelief, rather than the PEACE which the resurrected Christ brings to us today.

The Gospel is “foolishness” to our sinful nature. It's crazy. Impossible. Unbelievable. Who would endure what Jesus did for people like the rich man, the Pharisees, Judas, Peter, Thomas ... me? How can one who is truly dead – truly be alive?

Just as Jesus spoke the Gospel to Thomas and the others, over and over again – so He has spoken His Word into our ears – and yet, do we demand a sign to prove that He really does love us, and has forgiven THAT sin?

Do you have to see the resurrected Christ to believe in Him? Do you have to receive your sign before you will pay attention to His Word? “Unless you give me what I want, I will never believe ...”?

“Have you believed because you have seen me?” Jesus says. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Blessed are YOU who have heard the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and have believed! Blessed are you who have received the promises of God attached to visible elements, so that faith can see that God is at work here, in Baptism, in the Supper, in the midst of us – forgiving sins and resurrecting us to new life!

Putting your finger in the nail holes or side of Jesus is not necessary – for you have something better – God's Word. Don't despise it (coveting something else). Don't play God. Hear His Word, and believe it – for by it, Jesus gives you what you need.

Even now the Resurrected Christ stands in the midst of you – turning your fear of man into joy with God – overcoming your death with His victorious resurrection – unlocking all that binds you, so that you may be free to live – not by sight, but by faith in God's Word – a Word by which He bestows His peace on you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.