

Easter 2, April 16, 2023

Text: John 20:19-31

Theme: Standing in Thomas' Shoes

I always felt superior to Thomas when I was a child and heard the story of "Doubting Thomas." How could he be so dumb as to doubt that the Lord God Almighty rose from the dead exactly as He had promised to do? Being a good Lutheran Sunday School child, I attended church and Sunday School most every week. I memorized the verses that we were given to memorize. I read my Bible at home most evenings before I went to bed and I had not yet encountered the real world. Children are by nature self-righteous. When I ask the preschoolers if they sin, every one of them vows and declares that they do not! Then I have to start digging. Have you ever disobeyed your mom or dad? Have you ever thought or said a mean thing about someone you know? Have you ever lied about anything like breaking something in the house or eating something you you're not supposed to eat? Eventually I can usually break through the self-righteousness but it is not easy. Children have their self-righteousness well-defended and it takes some mining to get to the truth of their sin.

When we grow up and have to encounter the world, we realize that living a holy and righteous life is much harder than we thought when we were children. It is easy to judge poor Thomas from the perspective of a

child's faith, but as adults, we see reality more clearly, and we can itemize the many times we have doubted Jesus.

Like we know that we are supposed to give God a faithful offering off the top of that with which He blesses us, before we pay bills or buy things, but we fail to do so time and time again, we stand in Thomas' shoes. When we clearly hear God's Word but following it doesn't make sense to us so we ignore it or justify changing it for our convenience, we stand in Thomas' shoes. When we know that God requires us to forgive but forgiving feels like we are letting the person who hurt us win, so we either boldly refuse to forgive or we pretend to forgive but really harbor anger or hatred in our hearts. Then we stand in Thomas' shoes.

In the reading from Acts we see the disciples on the hot seat. The leaders are telling them to stop preaching the resurrection of Christ. They know that they are facing the same fate as Christ if they continue their preaching. Peter bravely says,

"We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Those are dangerous words. At that moment they had to know that they were all

headed for crucifixion, but God intervened. Here is a great example of how God uses the very people who were attacking them to save them. Gamaliel argues that if they make martyrs out of the disciples, they might be encouraging the whole movement, so just beat them and set them free.

We don't like the beatings, but God never said it would be easy to stand up for Him. He only promises that it will be good. When we leave Thomas' shoes and stand for Christ, those who oppose Christ will turn on us. They will seek to harm us. They will seek to undermine us and do all manner of evil to us and that is why Jesus says to His disciples and to us, "Peace be with you." That is not just a pleasant wish. It is a command to us and to the world around us. Peace will be with us when we stand for Christ. Look at Thomas' reaction. "My Lord and my God!" That is a confession of faith. That is Thomas' faith coming to the front and taking over and it works for us as well.

When you are faced with those times when you are tempted to ignore Christ, minimize Christ or even rebel against Christ, remember Christ's Words to us and to Thomas, "Do not disbelieve, but believe." Just as those words created within Thomas the resolve to confess Christ, so will they do for you as well. Jesus does not leave us with a command and no power to fulfill it. We have both: the command to confess him with our lips and our lives and the power to do just that. He comes to us through

His Word and in His very body and blood and we have the power to stop doubting, to believe and to live for Christ in the face of anything.

This is not fluffy talk and pie-in-the-sky notions. Do not hear me and think, “yeah, yeah, more gobbledygook about trusting Jesus and standing up for what is right.” At Trinity Lutheran Church, we have experienced this first hand. When the government told us to shut down and we refused, we could have had consequences leveled upon us. I could have gone to jail, but we trusted Jesus. We believed that that Jesus wanted us to gather for worship no matter what any earthly ruler commanded and we obeyed God rather than man. He protected us. We were reported to the police. We were reported to the village. We were reported to the Bishop. We were reported to the President of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and we just kept worshipping while police cars sat in the parking lot but never interfered. We were protected by Jesus. That’s what He does when His people stand up and refuse to be cowed down by politically correct bullies.

Peter was steadfast and a bunch of hysterical politicians who saw all their power floating out the window was not going to dissuade him. And he won. That’s the moral of the story when you do what Jesus says to do. It won’t be pretty. Bullies will bully and woke people will whine and cry. We might even get a few scrapes and bruises. But, when you follow Jesus and do what He says, we win. We win every time.