

Reason to Believe
John 20:19-31

As the story goes years ago there were two little boys who attended a rather strict and proper Christian school. Now these little boys were not the strict and proper type but preferred frogs and bugs and a more active learning style, so you can see the problems which this was bound to cause. So one fine morning their poor teacher couldn't take any more of their exuberance and so in exasperation she sent them off to the principle's office.

Well the principle felt these two boys might shape up if they had some of the fear of God put in them – so he brought the first boy into his office and sat him down, then in his strictest and most severe principle's voice he asked “Young Man, where is God! Where is God!”

The young boy looked a bit perplexed and so the principle asked him again “Where is God?” he growled. This time the boy looked frightened – so the principle figured that the job was done and sent him out to tell the other boy to come in. However this is what the principle overheard -

Hey Johnny – the principle wants to see you now, It sounds serious, somehow God is missing and they are trying to pin it on us!

Friends, as we read in our scripture passage the disciples are in a similar situation. Jesus' body was missing from the tomb, and the rumor was being spread that the disciple's had stolen the body. God is missing and they are trying to pin it on the disciples. So the disciples were afraid and they were hiding out in a house with the doors locked – and they too were wondering where is God, where is his chosen one, what has happened to the Messiah.

And then miracle of all miracles, Jesus appears to them, showing them the wounds from his crucifixion to prove to them they were not hallucinating, they were not imagining things, nor were they seeing some sort of ghost – no it was the risen Lord Jesus, and they are overjoyed!

But, someone missed out on this experience, somebody wasn't there. We don't know where Thomas was, but he missed out seeing on Jesus, and he missed out on what Jesus said to the disciples.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven, if not they are not.

Jesus sends, empowers, and authorizes the disciples and Thomas wasn't there when it happened.

Now the events of Jesus life, death, resurrection and are not just randomly selected and told haphazardly. All the material in each gospel was specifically selected and arranged by each gospel writer and told in a particular manner to achieve their overall purpose for writing their gospel, and that certainly is true in this case as well.

So let's look at some of the connections and similarities that John deliberately includes as he recounts Jesus appearance to the disciples and then to Thomas

- First you have the location – Both times the disciples are in a house with the door locked

- You have Jesus entrance – he just shows up and stands among them
- You have Jesus greeting – “Peace be with you”
- You have references to Jesus wounds – “His hands and his side”
- Finally Jesus has an address, something to say to the disciples

Now because there are these connection points between the two episodes, we should pay attention. Because in doing so we will also notice what is different between them and that is what was meant to stand out and tell us something.

So what is different?

- When Jesus appears to the disciples the first time, he shows them his hands and side and this is what helps them recognize him as Jesus, very little is made of it.

In the second visit the reference to the hands and side occurs twice, and a big deal is made out of it.

- In the 2nd visit the word “believe” occurs for the first time. It's not mentioned in the first visit.
- Finally, in the 2nd appearance Jesus' address deals with Thomas and what he has said. Jesus does not address the whole group.

So let's keep these differences in mind as we look at what seems to be the focal point of the story - namely Thomas' reaction to the news that the other disciples have seen Jesus.

And His reaction is this - Instead of showing joy and amazement at the fact that Jesus is alive, and a sense of purpose from hearing that Jesus had commissioned, empowered and authorized them as disciples, Thomas picks up on the minor detail of how the disciples recognized the Lord and he makes it into a big deal.

But the fact is that Jesus' wounds are only a minor detail, it helps the disciples recognize him in this story. The major detail is that He is alive, and He has come to tell the disciples something important, revolutionary.

He's come to tell the disciples - that as God the Father had sent him, from this point on, Jesus was sending them.

He's come to breathe on them as a guarantee that He will send them the Holy Spirit. He says it to them.

He's come to authorize them to forgive sins! Only Jesus had done that up to this point.

These are the major details – not the scars on Jesus' hands and sides.

But, Thomas doesn't wonder or ponder on these amazing developments. Instead He makes an issue about Jesus' wounds. Not only does he want to see them as the others had – he needs to go a step further and put his fingers in the nail holes and his hand in the spear wound in Jesus' side. As it to

say that Jesus is still dead – not raised and healed. And If he can't do this, and he can't because Jesus is healed – he won't believe it!

Believe what?

That what the disciples claim to have seen was in fact Jesus – alive and in the flesh. Not a ghost or a delusion.

Was Thomas some sort of rational skeptic? A materialist who can't quite bring himself to believe that supernatural miracles like resurrection are possible, and he needs to have tangible proof to believe it?

No friends, Thomas is wrestling with something far deeper. He is not a skeptic asking for material proof. He is a disillusioned follower who is jabbing at the wounds of Christ in anger because of what they represent. Thomas cannot reconcile that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah and that He was....that he even could be, rejected by the Jewish leaders and handed over to Rome for execution. What humiliation, what disgrace!

His declaration of the evidence needed for him to believe is really a sarcastic refusal to believe that this suffering and death was a necessary part of Jesus ministry – that it was integral to who Jesus was as messiah.

Hey Thomas – guess what we've seen the Lord!

Oh great – you've seen Jesus! He's alive and making incredible promises again is he? Sending us out, promising the Holy Spirit, giving us authority to forgive sins!

All he is doing is getting us to hope in him again, like before when he allowed himself to be crucified and killed – even if he is back from the dead I'm a little disillusioned with him and all his messiah stuff.

I tell you what – if I can see those marks, like you did – then I want to put my finger in them, I want to stick my hand where the spear was jabbed into his side – ya then I'll believe!

What a ridiculous statement – how would Thomas be able to do this? How would he get in contact with Jesus to arrange this? And even if he did - what would it do to help him to

believe. How would Jesus wounds help him to accept Jesus' commission, empowerment and authority?

Only if He came to understand that what Jesus had said to the disciples could only happen because He had sacrificed himself. But Thomas can't grasp that, he's not able to accept it.

So ironically Thomas makes this outrageous statement, which is his way of stating that he refuses to believe that it was through Jesus sacrifice and death that they as disciples would take part in the messiah's mission.

But, Thomas was one of Jesus twelve disciples and Jesus had invested in calling Thomas to be his disciple to go and continue his mission. He is not about to let Thomas go, so in as bold a manner as Thomas had thumbed his nose at Jesus with his remark – Jesus shows up again, unexpectedly, and unannounced.

“Peace be with you” he says once again – and then it's all about Thomas.

Thomas must have been just a little freaked out, and embarrassed at this point. Jesus has showed up and is calling his bluff – Hey Thomas here I am, put your finger here, reach out your hand! Jesus gets behind the facts of his statement and deals with his emotions, his disillusionment. Stop doubting and believe!

Believe what?

Believe that it was through the humiliation of these wounds, what these scars represent, victory over sin and death through suffering, that I am now sending you, empowering you with the Holy Spirit and authorizing you to let people know their sins are forgiven by proclaiming this event – my death and resurrection! It is not shame and humiliation – it is Life!

To which all Thomas can say is “My Lord and My God!” Yes I believe.

So friends what about us? Can you relate to Thomas in this story? On a very factual level we all need to hear Jesus words – stop doubting and believe. Believe that there is more to life

than what we can touch and see, believe that life after death is possible, believe that Jesus defeated death because He is God! Believe that your sins are forgiven and that you have eternal life because of Jesus Christ. Put your faith in Jesus.

But Jesus also said “Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe.” This takes the story to the next level for us. It is a call to believe that Jesus’ commission, empowering, and authorizing, extend not only to the disciples who saw Jesus, but also to all those who would not be able to see him – but only hear to about him, only read to about him, as we are doing in this story.

So friends, this is directly aimed at you and I who, 2000 years later are reading this.

Friends, like the disciples, as we celebrate Easter we witness that Jesus went through brutal suffering and death, and came back to life. WOW! – but the real miracle is not that Jesus overcame such physical distress and death but that this risen Jesus sends **us**, gives **us** the Holy Spirit and tells **us** to forgive the sins of others!

That’s incredible, its amazing!

But, we may not see it that way. We may not want to go on this journey, for many reasons.

Maybe we’re disillusioned like Thomas was - we don’t understand how suffering and death can bring life?

Maybe we’re afraid of being rejected or receiving hostile treatment.

Maybe we’re embarrassed about believing in Jesus, having faith in our secular society,

Maybe we resent the sacrifice it will take to pursue the mission Jesus has sent us on, after all no student is above their teacher – Jesus had to sacrifice his life why should it be any different for us, I don’t want to sacrifice my life – my time, my money, my family, my credibility, my career.

But Jesus says – Blessed are... Blessed are... blessed those who have not seen me and yet believed.

The message to us is this - If you will accept the mission that Jesus sends us on, if you will stop doubting, stop resisting and believe, believe and participate – you will be blessed!

What does that mean for us?

Well I think Jesus himself described it best when he said:

²⁹"I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

That sounds like a good deal to me! What do you think? Will you say with Thomas – My Lord and My God?

Well friends, if you do, as go from here today – wherever you are this week – Remember you are sent there by Jesus.

We are Christ's ambassadors and it is our task to let people know the good news - that they can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus name.

I want you to believe and trust that you have the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to do this, and do it!

And friends when you do this, you will be blessed – even if it costs you! – Jesus himself said so, and that, friends, is our reason to believe. Amen.