

Quasimodogeniti Sunday

THOMAS THE JUST!

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John 20:19–31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked where the disciples gathered for fear of the Jews and Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 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.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed.”

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

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN!

Last week was an incredible week. The women went to the tomb at first light hoping to give Jesus the last thing they could, a proper burial. They were filled with anxiety and despair. They didn't know how they would move the massive stone that covered the opening of the grave. To their amazement the stone had been rolled back and when they entered the crypt they were greeted by two angels who glowed like lightning. Their message was: ***“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. But He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go and quickly tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him again”***. Anxiety turned to joy. On their way to the disciples they are greeted by a man, and it was the Lord. They fell at His feet and worship Him. Jesus tells them the same message as the angels. But did the disciples believe them? Oh, Peter and John ran to the tomb and looked in to see no one was there. They might have been astonished but did they believe?

I. DOUBT, ANXIETY AND FEAR FILLED THE DISCIPLES

Listen once again to the directive given by the angels and by the Lord. ***Then go and quickly tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him again”***. What did the disciples do after hearing the news? Listen to verse 19 part a: ***“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,...”*** Where were they? They were in Jerusalem, not heading for Galilee where they would see the Lord. Why? Because of Shiva! Shiva means seven and it is the practice of seven days of mourning for the dead. They were not going anywhere until they had fulfilled the custom of showing love and respect for the dead. Our text also says were they afraid of the Jews, why? Possibly they feared reprisal.

What are three most important things in understanding the Scriptures? Context, context and context! So let's stop for a moment and consider the social context, the Sitz im leben, where it sits in

life. In the Society of Jesus day the greatest disgrace one could do was to desecrate a grave. Roman soldiers were often instructed to devastate burial places to break an unyielding nation. It showed the willingness to violate even the dead for the purposes of victory.

Also in the Jewish society people would pilgrimage to the tombs of Holy men to be close to God. There they would find peace and guidance, strength and encouragement. When a gravesite wasn't known for certain such as in the case of Moses, then the whole Mount, which is Mount Nebo became a memorial site. When Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire that whole area around the Jordan River became a memorial site, a place of pilgrimage. By that way, that is where John the Baptizer, baptized.

You see, it is quite possible that the disciples thought the Pharisees and the Chief Priest had taken the body of Jesus to desecrate and destroy it, to keep His tomb from becoming a shrine for the followers of Jesus. And if they were willing to go that far to stop the Jesus movement, would they not also destroy the followers?

Into a small dark room behind locked doors the disciples hid in fear.

II. BUT DOUBT, ANXIETY AND FEAR FILLED OTHERS AS WELL

Before we jumped into our text again it's important to consider the other players in our text. What about the Chief Priest and Scribes and Pharisees. Did they know the body of Jesus was missing? Sure they did! I believe the Chief Priest had his finger on the pulse of the community especially concerning Jesus and His followers. But how would have he understood the missing body? Remember Caiaphas was most likely a Sadducee and didn't believe in the resurrection of the flesh. Caiaphas was schemer and was willing to violate the rules and codes that regulated his office as High Priest. Would he have expected that same attitude from others? Of course he would! Fear and anxiety would have filled those Jewish officials. If the followers of Jesus had taken His body they could promote a charade of resurrection without showing Him alive. They could fashion a coup against the current Jewish leadership with the hope of usurping their authority. So the disciples probably weren't the only ones lacking peace that night. On top of all of this, was the fear that God had taken great hot displeasure in them. After all the Temple curtain was rend from top to bottom exposing the Holy of Holies, the temple itself was in great disrepair after the earthquake. So we now leave the Jewish leaders in their moment of anxiety, doubt and fear.

What about Pilate the Roman Governor. He surely knew Jesus body was missing. Did he believe Jesus rose from the dead? I doubt it! But he would have been filled with anxiety as well. This missing body, what was next? Would there be a revolution on his watch? Would he need to step between the Jewish leadership and the great populous that supported Jesus while He was alive? Would the people use Jesus as an excuse to try and repel Rome? So there we have it, anxiety, doubt and fear present in the group of followers, the enemies of Jesus and the government of the time.

One thing in all of this would be certain, those Jewish leaders, the Roman soldiers and officials and even the disciples themselves would have all been looking for Jesus. All of them, other than the women, looking because they didn't really believe Jesus had risen from the dead they just wanted to locate the corpse.

III. BEHIND LOCK DOORS

We return to our text and find the disciples in fear, worrying about every footstep approaching the door, every hushed whisper outside in the darkness. They have locked the door but that only keeps honest men out. In the midst of this turmoil, in the midst of all of this stress, in the midst of all of this anxiety and in the midst of all of this unbelief Jesus comes and stands among them. Doors and fear and anxiety cannot keep Him out. He says: ***"Peace be with you"*** and He shows them His hands and side. And they were filled with joy. Jesus words, ***"Peace be with you"*** filled them with joy. His words created the peace within them. They weren't simply happy to see Jesus, they were filled with joy. A joy caused by Jesus words. Make no mistake about it; with these words Jesus absolves them of the sin of disbelief and with these words Jesus speaks into them JOY. Oh the creative power of God's Word. And Jesus breathes on them and says, ***"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." Jesus has commissioned His Apostles to send them out, to forgive sins and create His church. They are ordained as the pastor's of the true Church. The church created by the blood of Jesus.

But there's a problem. One of the disciples was not with them when Jesus came, Thomas the Just! Now you might be thinking, "Pastor you mean Thomas the doubter don't you?" No Thomas the Just. Listen to John 20:25 again: ***So the other disciples told him (that is Thomas), "We have seen the Lord!" But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and unless I put my finger where the nails were, and unless I put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."*** Thomas the Just. What Thomas is saying is: JUST let me put my finger in His hands, JUST let me put my hand in His side, until then I JUST won't believe. Thomas the Just!

Before we criticize Thomas we need to stop and see the Thomas in us all. How often do we say something like this: "If God wants me to share my faith with my neighbor He just needs to give me an opportunity, I just need a good opportunity". Or, "If God really wants me to do something for the church then He just ought to tell, until I hear it from Him I just won't do anything". Or from the unbelieving world, "If you want me to believe in God, just prove He exists!"

We could spend hours on how often we try to tell God His business with just statements, Lord just do this, Lord just do that. We really are in no position to look down on Thomas, oh how we can relate to him and by the way, we should.

IV. FOR THOMAS IS JUST!

Eight days later, Jesus' disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas wanted nothing more than the others had received. He just wanted proof that Jesus was alive. ***Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you are now seeing me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*** Did the other disciples believe before seeing Jesus? No! Yet Thomas is called the doubter. When we focus on Thomas as the doubter we miss out the important lessons from the text. Here a couple of them.

1. None of us has faith until we are touched by God.

We are touched by God the Word. John 1:1 ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*** And verse 14: ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*** When you hear preaching you are hearing the Word. Not simply a bunch of nouns and verbs thrown together to make a sentence, but the very Word who became flesh to make His dwelling among us. ***For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ,*** Romans 10:17. That Word touches your ears and it creates faith.

That same Word is combined with the water in Holy Baptism and touches you and gives you faith and salvation. When you were baptized the very flesh of Jesus enveloped you. You were touched by Christ; His flesh became your flesh for you were clothed in His righteousness. When you take the Lord's Supper you touch His own flesh and His own blood. This is not some mere symbol. He says, ***"Take eat this is my body. Take drink this is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins."*** This is not some representation, for it is what He (✠) says it is. We like Thomas touch our Lord and savior and in that touching comes faith and faith leads to the next thing we can learn from Thomas the Just, CONFESSION.

2. For Thomas gives us the answer to who this Jesus is. Thomas confesses: ***"My Lord and my God!"***

Jesus is not merely some prophet, He is God! Jesus is the great I AM! Jesus does not rebuke

Thomas for calling Him God. Instead He says after Thomas' truly God breathed confession: "**Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**" That's you and me. We are blessed when we believe He is Lord and God.

In Him (✝) there is life and forgiveness. For in Christ Jesus you have the full forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. All because God has touched you in same way that He touched Thomas the Just. For in Jesus all of your sins are forgiven and heaven is yours.

Hear once again the Word of the Lord, **Peace be with you** in Jesus name. Amen and amen.

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