

## THOMAS, A MAN FINDS FAITH

Sermon for 2nd Sunday of Easter by The Rev. Ralph W. Bayfield, April 19, 2020  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Pine Grove, Bluemont, VA  
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On this Second Sunday of Easter, the first two appearances of Jesus to the disciples in the Gospel of John are always read. In the first appearance, (20:19-23), the mission of the Church is defined, and the disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out this mission.

As the reading begins, it is Easter evening. Earlier in the day, Peter and the beloved disciple had seen the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene who had then gone to tell the disciples, she had seen Jesus alive (20:1-18). However, none of the disciples had imagined a bodily resurrection, and they were not ready to believe Mary's report.

Because Jesus had been executed on charges of sedition, his followers had reason to believe that their lives might be in danger because of their association with Jesus. The frightened disciples are gathered behind locked doors when Jesus suddenly appears in the room. Jesus no longer subject to human limitations, overcomes their fears and transforms the situation as He greets the disciples with the words, "Peace be with you" (20:19).

Jesus shows the disciples his wounds on his hands and side. They react with joy as they recognize Jesus. The message Mary had brought them earlier that *she had seen the Lord* (20:18) is now confirmed by their experience. They rejoice in the midst of the sorrow and turmoil the day has brought.

However, these familiar words of peace are more than a customary greeting. They are in fulfillment of Jesus' former promises of His ultimate vindication,

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let them be afraid” (14:27). “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage, I have conquered the world” (16:33)! Jesus entrusts his followers with a mission as He repeats the message of peace and proclaims: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”(20:21). Just as God the Son has revealed God the Father, now the disciples are to reveal God the Son to the world (17:18)- to bring the message of peace and joy of the Risen Jesus to future generations of disciples.

The disciples cannot accomplish this on their own, so the Lord gives them the power they will need. He breathes on them (just as at the beginning of creation, God breathed life into the first man Adam in Genesis 2:7). Jesus says to the disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (20:22). In accordance with Jesus earlier promises in John (14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26) this is the *gift of the Spirit* to the community that will empower them as *witnesses for Jesus in the world*.

Jesus adds a further charge to the disciples to *forgive or retain the sins* of any of the people. Since sin is separation from God, this is done today in corporate worship with *Confession* followed by *Absolution*, or privately with an Ordained Priest.

Although the word “church” is not mentioned in John’s Gospel, the model for Christian community is clearly defined here. Thus the Church throughout history and today is empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent out into the world as Jesus himself was sent by God the Father.

The second appearance of Jesus occurs a week later and the focus is on faith. The Apostle Thomas, who had been absent the week before, now enters. When told of the Lord's Risen Presence, Thomas expresses the need to *see for himself* Jesus physical wounds, the nail prints in his hands and the scar in His body caused by the spear that the Roman soldier threw after Jesus death on the cross.

When Jesus once again appears with the greeting of peace, He offers Thomas the proof of His Wounds saying, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.(20:27)"

Thomas doubt is immediately turned into a profound declaration of faith as he answered: "*My Lord and My God*"(20:28)! Jesus said to him, "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*"

*Jesus is indeed the Risen Christ.* There is no need for Jesus to breathe on Thomas. Through the representative acceptance of the other disciples, he has already received the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

John concludes the Gospel passage telling us, "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Synthesis Year A, Easter 2- Scripture*;PNSMI Press, Boyds, MD, April 27, 2014 pg.1

<sup>2</sup> *Revised Common Lectionary, Episcopal Edition*; Year A, Church Publishing Incorporated, New York , 2007 Yr. A 2 Easter, page 118

If ever there was a need for faith in Jesus Christ it is now. This week the world is surrounded by a deadly coronavirus pandemic.

*The Washington Post*, Friday, April 17, 2020 reported: the deadly coronavirus caseload for the Washington area doubled in the recent week to over 20,000 patients. The death toll reached 750 as of Thursday and it continues climb. An economic standstill implemented to stem the virus spread, wrought financial pain and worry. An additional 177, 450 people filed for unemployment assistance last week, pushing jobless ranks to almost 400,000 people in the area. As most of you know, all but essential businesses shut down.

District and state groups begged city and government leaders for immediate aid to prevent a wave of bankruptcies and permanent closures. People are pressing Governors and President Trump to work together to release plans for how and when commerce will reopen. People are saying they need hope. The reality for thousands of small businesses and their employees is stress and desperation. However, we dare not reopen too soon and risk a recurrent attack of the coronavirus. The coronavirus that has struck the world and hit our nation is going on and threatening to last for months. Staying home where possible, and frequently washing our hands, is the patriotic thing to do. We are encouraged to maintain distancing from other people, no closer than six feet. Some of you may have special ministry's, in essential works, such as medical professions and support, grocery connections, fire, rescue, police services, and many other vocations etc.. If you must go out and will come in contact with people, masks and protective clothing are a necessity. The Federal grants to individuals and company's will not last very long, but

are necessary until businesses rebound. Housing is a problem. The city marked off squares on streets where homeless can live outdoors and not be in contact with each other.

Churches are closed, but people are keeping in touch by telephone. In some areas, volunteers are working in food pantry's to feed the hungry. The harmony of the so many people working together is a sign of the real strength of the United States. All of us can pray for each other in this local, national, and worldwide epidemic. AMEN

### *PRAYERS*

*FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY - by The Rev. Charles F. Price,  
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O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in the bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer, pg. 815*

### *TO COMBAT THE CORONAVIRUS*

Almighty God, you have given us this good land for our heritage. Now we are besieged by the powerful coronavirus that is causing the disease of Covid19. It has brought a plague of sickness and death that is confronting the world, our nation, and our local community's in relentless waves of the infectious virus. Bless those who are working to find a cure, to develop medicine, testing kits, medical masks, gloves, gowns, and face shields. Bless the many members of the medical profession, the Doctors, Nurses, Health Administrators, Medical Technicians, Orderlies, Meal providers, all the people in the countless supportive roles that combat the coronavirus. Bless all those who serve, through Jesus Christ. AMEN

*FOR OUR COUNTRY*

O Lord our governor, whose glory is in all the world.

Endue with wisdom to act wisely the leaders of our government, the President and Vice-President of the United States, the Governors of our states, Mayors, and Council people who must make decisions about when to re-open businesses, schools, teams and then to allow assorted groups of people to gather again. We ask you to bless all others serving in supporting roles. We pray for the members of the Medical Profession, Doctors, Nurses, Technicians, members of the Armed Forces, and countless people who work for the common good. Keep safe and be with our Police Officers, the Fire Company Crews. Save us from violence, confusion, and protect the people of this good land. May God's blessings be with them night and day. Amen.

Bless O Lord, anyone who is known only by you, and comfort all those who are by themselves, but not alone, for we know you are beside them through Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

*THE PEACE AND BLESSING*

*The peace of God which passes understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, and the Blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you always. AMEN*

*P.S. Dear Lord and good people, please bless anyone I have neglected to mention and forgive me. AMEN*