

Peace Be With You

John 20:19-31 (NIV84)

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

When we left the women on Easter Sunday morning, they were trembling with fear and completely beside themselves. They were too amazed to comprehend what had just happened. The Gospel writer Mark says, "They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." (Mark 16:8) But why were they so afraid? Jesus had risen! The angel said so. Everything has changed. This is exactly what Jesus told them would happen. Yet they are afraid.

The disciples, when they heard the women's story, didn't buy it. And you could see why. Imagine what the women's story would have sounded like. "So, went and bought spices soon after sundown, got it all arranged, and headed to the tomb. When we got there, the stone had been rolled away! We didn't do it. We were even wondering how we would be able to roll it away. We got up to the tomb, and there was no body, just the burial linens. But there were two men dressed in shining white robes – robes so white, you had to shield your eyes. We couldn't really even look at them. One of them spoke. He told us that we were looking for Jesus, but that he wasn't here. He told us that Jesus had risen and that he was going to meet you disciples in Galilee. We left to come find you. And then Jesus himself appeared to us while we were on our way. We fell down and worshiped him, clasped his feet. But he told us not to hold on to him, but to go and tell you that he was going to meet you all in Galilee."

Luke records the disciples' response: "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." (Luke 24:11) They had the same reaction when the two disciples on the road to Emmaus came and told them that they had seen the Lord. Thomas didn't believe his fellow disciples when they told him that Jesus had come and appeared to them. You would think that the disciples would welcome the idea that Jesus is not dead. But they didn't believe. And they lived in fear of the Jews, that those who killed Jesus would come back and kill them as well.

Why didn't they instantly believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? Could there be a reason not to believe it, to be skeptical of it? On the one hand, maybe it's one of those, "It's-too-good-to-be-true" events. You want to believe it, but all of your natural reasoning says that this can't be done. Dead people don't raise themselves back to life. Even with those other people who were raised from the dead - like Lazarus, the boy at Nain, and Jairus' daughter - Jesus was the one doing it. They didn't raise themselves from the dead. Now the one who raised people from the dead is dead himself. John saw him die. The women saw Jesus' body placed in that tomb. Dead people stay dead. This is too out there to believe. I don't want to be fooled into believing something that isn't true.

Could it be that the disciples didn't want to believe it? Think about the last time Jesus saw his disciples. They had run from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter and John turned around at one point and came back, and they were there for Jesus' mock trial. But the last time Peter saw Jesus it was as they locked gazes after he had denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus said that he would. Realizing his sin, Peter went out and wept bitterly. John stuck around even to the crucifixion. He, along with the women, watched Jesus die. Jesus didn't save himself. He gave up his spirit. John watched Jesus breathe his last.

Given that the last time they had seen Jesus it was either as they were committing a sin against him or they were watching him die, what would he have to say to them if he was now risen from the dead? Would he condemn them from running away in the Garden? Would he tell them that they disappointed him by not staying by his side like they said I would? Would he ask them why they didn't

come to his aid and defense when he went to trial, as he was scourged with the Roman whips, as he hung on the cross? If Jesus is alive, I'm afraid of what he will think of me now. It's tearing my up inside thinking about this.

The disciples and the women were afraid. They expressed their fear about their Lord being dead with skepticism. They wouldn't believe the women initially. Thomas wouldn't believe from his fellow disciples' lips that Jesus had risen from the dead. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (verse 25) Where's the proof? I don't want to believe that he is risen, I don't want to have to face my fears and rebukes, unless I know it as an absolute certainty. I don't want to be conned. I don't want false hope.

All the evidence is there, but even followers of Christ didn't believe it had happened. The women saw the angel and Jesus. The disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Jesus break bread with them. The rest of the disciples minus Thomas saw Jesus in that locked room. The soldiers were paid to tell people that the disciples took the body, but the disciples knew the truth that they hadn't. Jesus himself said that he would rise from the dead on the third day. Every sign, every evidence points to it being real, that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

Yet people, including Christians, even on that first Easter would not believe it. It was like some kind of fear of commitment. They maybe liked the idea, had hoped that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, but they could be wrong. If they were wrong, they would look like a fool. Their faith would be useless, and they would have no hope. But if I can keep my foot wedged in the door and not fully commit to believing this impossible event, then I can make up my own mind about it later. I can bail on Jesus if this isn't looking legit so that I am not duped into believing the impossible, the unnatural.

Do you ever have those moments when that fear strikes you? In those dark moments at night, left alone to your thoughts, times of tragedy, times of loss, and you are asking yourself, "Is this all made up? Am I in the wrong religion? Is this the wrong church?" Even your pastor has moments where these thoughts have come into my head, those questions that want me to wonder if this is all real. For that split second of doubt, it's like a panic attack. If this isn't true, then everything I have ever believed goes out the window with it. For that moment, I am lost and afraid because it feels like I have no certainty. My world is completely shaken up. Jesus could call me out for my unbelief. I would have no answer for him. What would he say to me if he knew that I sometimes have my doubts about him, his resurrection, everything he has given me in his Word?

That's what happens as Satan tries to make you skeptical of Christ, of his resurrection from the dead. He plants those questions so that you become afraid, that you become plagued with doubts, that you feel as if nothing is certain and no one can know the truth.

Jesus knows that his disciples were afraid to believe that he had risen from the dead. He knew that they were being tempted by Satan to not believe the message, to not believe the women, to fall into skeptical unbelief, and thus live in fear.

Knowing that they were afraid to believe that he had risen from the dead, Jesus shows up. He appears in the room with the disciples, the door securely locked. The first thing he does is announce, "Peace be with you!" (verse 19) He doesn't call them out on their sin, for forsaking him, running from him, denying him, not coming to his aid, for doubting him. Instead, he shows them his hands and side. He shows them that yes I did actually die for you, the wounds were real, but I have come back to life for you that you would know without a shadow of a doubt that my mission of saving you was accomplished.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (verses 21-23) This is no trick. I came back to life so that you can know that your sins are forgiven, even these sins of doubting that I rose from the dead. Now go and announce this forgiveness of others, take away their doubts and fear. Give them the peace that only I can offer. I have conquered sin and death that you would have peace from your fears that this wasn't real, that I wasn't really the Savior.

Even for Thomas, Jesus goes out of his way to show him exactly what he wanted and demanded to see and gave him peace from his doubts. "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (verse 29) Thomas saw and believed.

Not everyone gets to see the risen Lord like Thomas did. Not everyone believes that Jesus was raised from the dead. We are tempted to not believe the Easter story, tempted to be skeptical that any of the Bible actually happened. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (verse 31) God hand chose everything that is in the Bible, especially this Easter resurrection appearance, specifically so that we would believe that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. This was meant for people who would never see Jesus in their lifetime on earth to believe that he had died for our sins and rose from the dead. He gave us this message to drive away our fear of being duped, the fear that this whole

Bible thing might not to be true. Instead of fear, he gives us peace confirming that he did actually rise from the dead, a peace that silences our moments of pondering if this was all real or not.

We have never seen the risen Lord, but we don't need to see him to believe it. He has given us the evidence. He has recorded the eye witness testimony of the women, of the disciples who went to Emmaus, of those in that locked room, and of Thomas. It's true. I am forgiven. I will live even after I die. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (verse 31) The Risen Christ silences our fears as he says, "Peace be with you." Amen.

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