

# “MY LORD AND MY GOD”

## John 20:19-31

Second Sunday of Easter -- April 3, 2016

It's probably very difficult for any of us to truly understand what those first disciples of Jesus were experiencing—that first Easter evening—when they were gathered together behind locked doors; afraid for their very lives. Though if you look back on your own life for a few moments, perhaps you can remember a time when someone you loved has died and you were wondering how you or going to face the future without him or her.

Maybe you've lost your job and were left wondering what in the world you would do with the rest of your life. Of course other people who were there and still gainfully employed told you not to worry about it because that was easy for them to say, because they had never really been where you were at!

Or maybe you were in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and your parents suddenly announced to you that they were moving you and your whole family to a new city—over the summer—where nothing in that city would be familiar to you at all—and the whole thought of your now being an outsider in a new city and in a new school, for the first time ever, is something to you that was downright scary!

I know that I, for one, have been in that kind of room before, several times, I am sure, when all of a sudden (to use an old cliché) it seemed to me that the rug had somehow now been, completely and surprisingly, pulled out from underneath my feet!

Yes, there's a pretty good chance that somewhere along this road called life, to some degree, at least, you have spent some time alone with Jesus' first disciples, locked away in a room like that! Maybe you are there now! But if you aren't there now, be grateful for that!

Maybe you are there now and falsely believe that you are the only one in this house of worship today, who is there. So let me assure you as the man who has the privilege of being your pastor that you are not the only one present in this room today, who is in a room like that!

You are there and what you need to know more than anything else is that Jesus Christ now stands in your midst and offers to you personally the blessing of his eternal peace!

He is the One whom the Apostle John praises in our second lesson today (Revelation 1:4-8) as: *“The firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth, who has loved us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father” (Revelation 1:5-6)!*

And certainly these words from our Gospel lesson today are here to assure you and to assure me that we will never find ourselves in a room so dark, or a room where the lock on the door is so tight, that the Risen Christ will be unable to enter that room and bring you his great word of peace! So let me ask you:

1. HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE THE ODD MAN OUT OR THAT SOMEHOW YOU WERE THE LAST ONE TO KNOW. Thomas must have felt like that! For Thomas was not there to receive the blessing of peace that the Risen Christ surely brought to his other disciples who were there, locked away in that Upper Room behind those closed doors in Jerusalem, that very first Easter evening! For some reason, Thomas just wasn't there!

When he does arrive back to that very location, however, the other disciples tell him that they themselves, just like Mary Magdalene and the other women told them, that they had seen Jesus alive, with their very own eyes, and that

our Lord even proved to them that it really was him—by showing them the scars in his hands and the scar in his side; those scars that were there because of the nails driven through his hands and that spear that had been thrust into his side.

When the disciples told Thomas that they had seen Jesus, he said, “No way! I’ve got to see that for myself, and until I see that for myself, and until I personally see the nail marks in his hands and side, and touch them for myself, I will not believe” (v. 24)!

Brothers and sisters we all sometimes struggle to believe something, don’t we?

I read of a man who said recently, “I can’t believe my wife turned 38 years old yesterday! She still looks so young and so beautiful! I can’t really believe that we are having another baby, but fortunately for me, on the ULTRASOUND I have heard the baby’s heartbeat with my very own ears, and six months from now, God-willing, my newborn baby’s hand will wrap its little hand around my forefinger and squeeze tightly, in the same way that his older brother and sister have!

There are times in all of our lives, no doubt, when our personal struggles and questions and doubts are deeper than that and may have us also locked behind closed doors. Sometimes these struggles, questions and doubts—run to the very core of our faith in God. We’ve all heard that old saying that: “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn’t true!” but this is not always the case! Though there are times when every one of us may experience what it is like to be the odd man out, or the last one to know, this surely isn’t ever God’s design for any of our lives!

## 2. CERTAINLY, OUR GOD WANTS EVERY ONE OF US TO KNOW AND TO BELIEVE FOR OURSELVES THE GOOD NEWS OF EASTER—THAT JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!

Our Gospel lesson this morning tells us that Jesus did come and that he stood among his disciples behind those closed doors that first Easter evening, where they actually believed that they had locked themselves away from any unwanted intruders. When the Risen Lord first came to them—he came to them and he stood among them with a greeting of peace! He brought to them by his resurrection power—an expression that must have not only done so much to calm their troubled hearts, but to also silence all their fears! But let’s never forget that the Son of God also brought to them what he knew for certain—to be their greatest need—and our greatest need also—and that’s the complete forgiveness of all their sins.

REASON #1: I can’t help but believe that one of the most important reasons why the Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to share with us this post-resurrection appearance of the Risen Christ to Thomas that first Easter evening is because that are always those people who foolishly imagine that if you and I ever have any doubts at all about any aspect of our faith, then we simply cannot be a good Christian, but this story is here to prove to us that this just isn’t true.

A second reason for including this story is BECAUSE THE APOSTLE JOHN, was the only one of Jesus’ first twelve disciples, who DID NOT DIE A MARTYR’S DEATH FOR THE GOSPEL, but who instead actually died, from what some people prefer to call today a “natural” death. Yes, to some degree “death” is something that comes naturally to all people, eventually at some time, but what isn’t natural is the strong hope that God wants to place inside of our hearts of eternal life! ROMANS 6:23.

Near the end of John’s life, there were now a number of second generation Christians who had been baptized and who were growing up in the Church, but who had never had an opportunity to see Jesus alive in his human body—during that time when he was among us for those 33 years—that we call his “State of Humiliation.”

Nor had they ever had the opportunity to see him alive in his resurrected body! So the Apostle John is comforting them with the good news that they would never be looked upon, however, as second class citizens, in the kingdom of God. And their faith should never be regarded as a secondhand faith in the kingdom of God.

The New Testament Gospels make plain to us that Peter was older than John, but Peter also had preached the Gospel to people, in various parts of the then known world, who had never seen Jesus alive in his physical body either, yet he writes to them those most endearing words in I Peter 1:8—9, “*Without having seen him you love him and though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls!*”

One week later, the Risen Lord did appear to the disciples in that Upper Room once again, and this time Thomas was numbered among them. And what did our Risen Savior say to Thomas? Did he give Thomas a real “tongue-lashing” that he would never forget! No, not hardly! Just as Jesus did not have harsh words for any of his disciples on the previous Sunday evening, by calling them cowards, or by shouting out to them the lyrics to that popular song: “You left me just when I needed you most!” so Jesus does not set out to demean Thomas, or excoriate him for his doubts at all either! Jesus honors Thomas’ request, and Thomas is brought to faith. And this is when Thomas cries out to Jesus: “My Lord and My God!”

You know Thomas was not a bad guy! As a matter of fact, from the two other times we hear words coming forth from his mouth, he must have been a pretty courageous man; a man who was willing to see things for what they really were, at face value, rather than to try to sugarcoat them and to make them into something that they were not!

In chapter 11 when Jesus announces he is going to Bethany because Lazarus has died, the disciples can hardly believe their ears! Given the hostility that they knew some of the religious authorities had in their hearts and minds towards Jesus in Jerusalem, their thinking was that for Jesus to go to the Holy City was nothing short of a person putting their head into the mouth of a hungry lion. But Jesus says he’s going there never the less! That’s when Thomas speaks up and says: “*Let us go also, that we may die with him*” (John 11:16). Certainly for Thomas to say such a thing required a great deal of devotion and courage on his own part too!

When Jesus was speaking to his disciples in that Upper Room on the night before he died, he told them, “*In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And you know the way to where I am going*” (John 14:2-5)!

Certainly all of the disciples present in that room that evening must have believed that Jesus was speaking to them very cryptically. No one else had the courage and fortitude to ask our Savior to clarify the meaning of his words, but Thomas did. Thomas said to him, “*Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way*” (v. 5)? This is when Jesus replied, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). Jesus is reminding us that One Door that leads from earth to heaven and that he is in fact that door, the One who died, of whom John also speaks to us in I John 2:2, when he says: “He died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world!”

THIRD REASON BEHIND THIS STORY. The story of Thomas is here to convince us that no matter how strong we ourselves might believe our faith in Christ to be, we should never take our faith for granted. And one of the most common ways that Christians can take their faith for granted—is by becoming very careless about their attendance at worship.

I don’t know where Thomas was that first Easter evening, but if he had been there in that Upper Room with the other disciples, think of all the pain and heartache he could have been spared!

I am not saying that Thomas was skipping a worship service that evening, but there are times when disciples of Jesus may grow very irregular in their attendance at corporate worship services and think nothing of it. I like the way that someone pointed out once that a coal that is removed from the fire and set off in a corner by itself is the first to go out!

Poor Thomas has had to walk the corridors of history known as "Doubting Thomas."

Why doesn’t it matter, however, that Thomas was really no different than any of the other of Jesus’ disciples when they first heard that Christ had been raised from the dead. They were all skeptical and doubted. You remember what we read in the Gospel lesson last Sunday from Luke 24. When the women came back and told the men of their experience at the empty tomb and of the angels who told them that Christ had risen from the dead, we read of the men folk in verse 11: “*But these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them!*”

And why DOESN’T it matter that there is much evidence in history supporting the claim personally became a missionary and carried the Gospel to the people of India, where there still exists today an order known as Christians of “St Thomas of India!” Nor does it seem to matter, to many people today, that this same tradition has Thomas suffering martyrdom for the faith. No! For in the minds of many, this man will always be remembered as “Doubting Thomas.” There are even some Christians contend that Thomas is the only disciple who ever opened his mouth to change feet, and

they still regard him today to be the patron saint of all of those who are always among the last to know. Thomas has gotten a bad rap. His reputation as a skeptic is undeserved.

Are you able to trust and are you able to believe without seeing? Which of us really has the right to throw the first stone at Thomas? Our relationships with others can cause us to be skeptical and to doubt!

Did you hear about those two brothers who were getting ready to boil some eggs and then to color them for Easter? The older brother said to the younger: "I'll give you a dollar, if you'll let me break three of these raw eggs on your head!"

"Promise?" asked the younger. "Do you really promise to do that?"

"Of course," the older brother replied and then he proceeded to break two eggs over his younger brother's head.

Standing stiff for fear that that whole goeey mess would get all over himself, the younger brother asked, "When is the third egg coming?"

"It's not!" replied the older brother. "If I broke the 3<sup>rd</sup> that would cost me a dollar!"

It certainly was not an easy goal for that disciple named Thomas to arrive at. But by the grace of God he actually did arrive there. He did come to that moment indeed when all of his doubts were finally conquered and suddenly he had as much blessed assurance going for him as any other believer throughout the history of the Church, no doubt has ever had.

University of Maine science professor Neil Comins stumbled onto a teaching device from considering, or perhaps enduring, his 4-Year old son's numerous "what-if" questions.

His four year old son, Tommy would ask him: "Hey Dad, what if I jumped out of the car while it was moving? What would happen?"

"Hey Dad, what if I stuck my tongue in the socket?" Or "What if I only drank root beer floats for meals?" Kids sometimes ask inane questions. But Professor Comins began to see this as a new way to draw his freshmen and sophomore students into the learning process.

One day he asked: "What if the Moon didn't exist?"

The answers to that question were huge. If the moon didn't exist, the earth would have much smaller ocean tides since the moon---accounts for the vast majority of the reason for the change of tides; high tides and low tides.

If the moon didn't exist, the earth would be rotating 3 times as fast as it is today. Our days would then be 8 hour days instead of 24 hour days. This also means that we would all be three times as old and sleep only one-third as many hours each night. If you are old enough to remember that box office hit that came out in 1980, 9 to 5, Dolly would not have been able to sing "9 to 5," but instead "1 to 4."

There would be 100 mile winds everywhere and horrifically more destructive tornadoes and hurricanes. We could forget about living or playing in any outdoor environment. Virtually, not only would all human life, but all and any forms of life as we presently know them, Dr. Comins taught his college students would be virtually impossible. That's actually a very amazing question with a very amazing answer, but the answer is far from being favorable.

St. Paul one day as the Corinthians a similar question, but his question went like this in First Corinthians 15, "What if the body of Jesus has stayed in that tomb?"

Then Paul goes on to give us the answer: *"If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then no one else would ever rise from the dead either! And if Christ is not raised from the dead, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. If Christ has not been raised then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins! If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied!"*

Then Paul bursts forth, however, *"In fact Christ has been raised from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead!"*

I would venture to say that every one of us, at some point, has probably walked side by side with Thomas in a state of doubt, because it's in our very nature to doubt what we cannot see. And because there are so many people in this world today who are not trustworthy, we unfortunately make the great mistake of transferring all of the mistrust we feel towards others some onto our God.

At times it is difficult to trust others and with good reason, but we can always have the great deal of personal assurance that we can always trust our God. That's why St. Paul says in II Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ! This is why we always say "Amen" to God for his glory!"

And when you hear that little word "Amen," you may remember from Sunday school years ago what it means! That little word "Amen," means: "Yes, may it always be so!" Amen