

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Quasimodo Geniti – April 24, 2022
John 20:19-31 – Thomas Cared About the Truth
By Vicar Peter Wagner

Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!* Amen. Our text is from the Gospel, from John chapter 20, when Thomas said, **“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.”** This is our text.

The Latin name for the Second Sunday of Easter is Quasimodo Geniti. It means, “Like newborns.” It comes from the opening line of today’s Introit, from 1 Peter 2:2, **“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word.”** Spiritually, we’re as immature as newborn babies. Like infants, we should be eager for every drop we can get of God’s lifegiving word. But just like babies can’t get milk on their own, we need someone to feed us with God’s word. God himself feeds us. He said so in the Introit, **“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it; and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”**¹ That rock is Christ. Sweet milk and honey flow from him.

And he satisfies us with his sweet word by means of apostles and preachers. So that’s the connection between Quasimodo Geniti and today’s Gospel text. John chapter 20, on the very pinnacle day of Christian history, on Easter Sunday itself, Christ sent out his apostles to feed us with the milk of his word.

God’s word is like milk and honey because the gospel is so sweet. It proclaims peace on earth from God to men. The first words Jesus spoke to his disciples after he rose were words of peace. **“Peace be with you,”** he said. Peace because you are no longer God’s enemies. Peace for my sake. You stand justified before the Father. You no longer need to fear his wrath.

Peace is the very heart of Easter. But forgiveness is necessary for peace. So forgiveness is at the heart of Easter too. That’s why the next words Jesus spoke concerned the forgiveness of sins. He breathed on his disciples and said, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”** That’s the heart of being an apostle. Being an apostle means being in the business of forgiving sins. It means delivering the peace of Easter. Apostles are sent with authority from Jesus to proclaim forgiveness and peace to the world. They have authority to forgive and retain sins, to bind and loose them before God on his throne in heaven.

So peace with God is at the heart of Easter, because forgiveness of sins is at the heart of Easter. And forgiveness of sins is at the heart of Easter, because life is at the heart of Easter – life and resurrection! For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. But it goes even deeper. Life is at the heart of Easter, because the living body of Jesus is at the heart of Easter. Jesus’ body given for you for the forgiveness of sins is the heart of the heart of it all.

But Thomas was not at the heart of Easter. He did not stand in the presence of the risen Lord. He was somewhere else. And since he was not an eyewitness to the risen body of Jesus, he could not become an apostle. To be an apostle is to proclaim confidently that Jesus is risen to bring peace and forgiveness. No one can ever testify as a witness in court unless they saw the crime committed with their own eyes. Hearing secondhand won’t cut it. So Thomas was only being honest. He only admitted he didn’t have the authority yet. If he was going to be an apostle, he needed the eyewitness credentials to back it up.

When Thomas demanded to touch the body of his crucified Lord, when he insisted on proof that the crucified man was alive, he showed that he took the possibility of resurrection very seriously. He wanted proof, because if it were true, it would change everything. Unlike Thomas, many skeptics today ridicule the faith and

¹ Psalm 81:10

make a mockery of Christ. That kind of insolent skeptic is condemned already. But Thomas was sincere. And we should take the resurrection seriously too. If Jesus is really alive, then he really rules as king. He is really coming again to judge the world. And we should live accordingly.

Thomas should not have doubted. But really, the other disciples were no better. Except for John, who believed without understanding (as we heard last Sunday), Peter and the others did not believe until they actually saw Jesus. Before Jesus came in their midst, they were hiding for fear of the Jews. They thought they were doomed. And so they showed they didn't believe Jesus would rise.

We're no better either. Sure, we acknowledge that Jesus rose from the dead – we confess it every week in the Creed – but does that change how we act? What about when we're with people that might ridicule our faith? Do we confess so boldly then? And that makes us worse than Thomas, since he knew that if Jesus were alive, it would change everything, and he went on to confess Jesus boldly as an apostle. Or perhaps we're content to believe emotionally that Jesus is alive, without considering whether it's historically true. The resurrection may as well be a feel-good story. That also makes us worse than Thomas, because he cared about the truth. He wanted to find out what was really true.

Thomas knew that Jesus is the only way, the only truth, the only life. He knew it because he asked Jesus in John 14, **"How can we know the way?"** And Jesus replied, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."**² So by demanding to see the marks of the nails and the hole made by the spear, Thomas was looking for the truth in exactly the right place. He was heading the right direction, straight to the heart of Easter. He was looking for truth in the living body of Jesus.

That's the point of Easter. Truth matters. Truth gives you new life, like Ezekiel's dry bones coming together and breathing. And truth is found in the living, breathing body of Jesus. God died and rose again to bring you peace and forgiveness – this is truth you can rely on.

To many, truth doesn't matter. On Thursday while I was visiting one of our shut-ins, I talked with the nursing home receptionist. She wanted to know if I was a priest, since she grew up Roman Catholic. I said I was studying to be a Lutheran pastor. "Do you still go to church?" I asked. "I don't need to go to church to find God," she said, "But I religiously say my prayers to my higher power every night. And I want my children to feel free to believe whatever they think is right." I replied that we don't go to church to please God, but because we need Jesus. Church is where Jesus promises to be with us for our comfort in his words and in his body and blood. She shrugged. "God is everywhere," she said, "Everyone can believe what they want." This complacent skepticism is so sad, and it's the most common religion in America. I'm sure you've heard it everywhere. As I walked away, I said, "Seek the truth. There is truth." And that truth is found in Jesus.

The truth of Jesus is found in the sweet milk of God's word, written down by the apostles. Jesus prayed to his Father, **"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."**³ Jesus himself is the incarnate Word of truth. We preach the true word of Christ, that he was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.⁴ Baptism comes with God's word promising new life. The Lord's Supper comes with the promised word of forgiveness in the living body of Jesus. This is all for you! Believe it and make it your own.

When Thomas finally did see the nail marks in the hands of Jesus, when he put his hand in his side, he believed immediately. Jesus said, **"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."** So Thomas thrust his hand into the living body of Jesus, into the very heart of Easter. There he found truth, truth that gives birth to faith. **"My Lord and my God!"** he cried. And from that moment, he was an apostle. He could say with John and Peter and the rest, **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and**

² John 14:5-6

³ John 17:17

⁴ Romans 4:25

testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.”⁵

When Thomas finally believed, he was transformed into a faithful apostle. According to ancient tradition, he preached the gospel as far east as India. Along the southwestern coast of India, he baptized many families, whose descendants still call themselves the Thomas Christians today. He was martyred by the spear near Madras, India in 72 AD.

Thomas believed, so that he overcame the world as an apostle and martyr. As we heard in today’s epistle from 1 John, **“This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”⁶** For us, overcoming the world means believing not what we’ve seen with our eyes, but listening to eyewitnesses like Thomas. Our new life is to be disciples of Jesus. Disciples listen to his words and absorb them. We need his forgiveness every day, because we disciples have a harder task than Thomas, a task that requires even greater faith than the apostles. We’re called to believe in a risen Lord that we have not seen.

Such faith is impossible without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. He shows us the word of truth. Thanks be to God for trustworthy apostles who unanimously agreed in their testimony! And by the way this proves the Holy Spirit inspired it all. Their words in the New Testament about the living body of Jesus are not merely the eyewitness testimony of men, but of God himself. Jesus sent them to write down our pure milk of the word, full of peace, forgiveness, and life.

And as disciples, we have even better promises than the apostles. Jesus was talking about us when he asked Thomas, **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Peter wrote to us, **“Though you have not seen him, you love him. 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.”⁷** And John wraps up his Gospel with words for us to hear. **“These things 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.”** And that is the heart of Easter. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in the risen Christ, unto life everlasting. Amen.

⁵ 1 John 1:1-2

⁶ 1 John 5:4-5

⁷ 1 Peter 1:8-9