

+ John 20:19-31 + “Jesus Lives” Means Certainty + 2nd Sunday of Easter + 7 April 2013 +

They had never felt so uncertain. The doors were locked. The windows were shut and they were scared. “What’s gonna happen now? If they did all that to Jesus, what will they do to us? I bet the mobs are just around the corner. I bet they crucify us too.” Just imagine the flood of emotions that threatened to overwhelm the disciples: uncertainty about the future; fear of what the Jews might do to them; guilt over how they had abandoned Jesus.

Every one of them had boasted, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I won’t. I’ll even die for you!” Yet every single one of them failed. On Thursday night in the garden, armed soldiers and temple guards hauled Jesus away in chains, but what did the disciples do? They fled. They abandoned Jesus to save their own skins. As they hid, they heard report after report of what happened to their teacher. Peter had denied Jesus just as the Master had said. Jesus was questioned and beaten and flogged and ridiculed. The thunderous shouting of the mobs, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”, could be heard across the city. Roman soldiers had brutally pounded large nails into Jesus’ hands and feet pinning him to a rough, wooden cross. What agony he suffered before he finally died! Then a soldier plunged a large spearhead into Jesus’ side to prove he was dead.

There was nothing uncertain about it. Jesus was dead. This Jesus had been their teacher for the past three years. He had calmed the wind and waves. He had raised the dead, but now he himself was dead. “Now what?” They were lost and confused. All they had left was uncertainty and fear. So they locked the house and waited for the end.

Friday turned into Saturday, but nothing happened. The calm unnerved the disciples, but Sunday arrived and strange things started to happen. As the sun’s first rays shined through the windows, hurried knocking suddenly shattered the quiet of the house. (Knock!) “Is it them?” One of the disciples peered through a crack in the door. Outside were several of the women who had followed Jesus, but they were acting strange. “Let us in! We went to the Lord’s tomb, but he wasn’t there! The stone was rolled away and two men told us Jesus lives!” The ladies came rushing in, all trying to tell the same story at the same time. Words couldn’t come out fast enough. Hands were excitedly waving in the air as they told the disciples, “Jesus lives!!”

...But the disciples didn’t believe them! “That’s ridiculous! Jesus alive? There’s no way! Why would his tomb be empty? Did someone steal his body? Is this the final indignity? It doesn’t make any sense!” Peter and John hurried to the tomb to investigate with Mary Magdalene following. John got there first, but Peter charged right into the tomb. “I see burial clothes, but no Jesus. Where could he be?” As they headed back, Mary stayed behind to mourn. “What have they done with my Lord?” A man came up and asked her, **“Woman, why are you crying?”** (John 20:15) Soon she was running back to the disciples! (Knock!) **“I have seen the Lord! Jesus lives!”** (John 20:18) The disciples could only scratch their heads. Before long, Peter came back, (Knock!) “The Lord appeared to me too! Jesus lives!”

Evening came and no one knew what was going on, when suddenly (Knock!). “Now what?” They opened the door to find two very out-of-breath disciples, who had just run seven miles back to Jerusalem from a little village called Emmaus. “We’ve seen Jesus! We were walking along, when this guy came up to us. We didn’t know who he was, but did he know his Scripture! He told us all about the Messiah until we got to Emmaus. We invited him for supper. There he took some bread, gave thanks, and suddenly we realized it was Jesus—ALIVE!! He disappeared, but Jesus lives!”

No one in that room expected any of this when they woke up that Sunday morning. “Could Jesus really be alive?” “Should I believe them? I don’t know what to think.” “There’s no way he could be alive! But didn’t he say...?” All this time the doors stayed locked, and uncertainty remained.

Suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst—the same Jesus who had just died, the same Jesus whom Nicodemus and Joseph had buried in the tomb. Jaws dropped with shock, but Jesus simply said, **“Peace be with you!”** Terrified the disciples thought he was a ghost. So Jesus showed them the nail marks in his hands and the large scar on his side. They watched him eat some fish, and suddenly their uncertainty vanished. “Jesus lives!!”

...But then the disciples got REALLY excited! If you were in their sandals, how would you feel? Again Jesus had to say, **“Peace be with you!** Calm down. Listen to me. **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**” Jesus wanted his disciples to stop and listen. Jesus wanted to share his peace with them. He wanted them to realize that even if the mobs ended their lives, they still had peace because he lives. He wanted them to realize that he forgave them for abandoning him in the garden because he lives. He wanted them to realize that certainty was theirs because he lives.

Do you ever find yourself hiding behind the locked doors of fear or worry as you face problems in your family or difficulties at work or school or the possibility of not having enough to pay the bills? Do you ever find yourself hiding behind the locked door of guilt over some sin that haunts you from your past or a sin of weakness you just can’t seem to shake? Do you ever find yourself losing hope because of all the uncertainty in our world, whether that’s the

constant conflict between people and nations or simply the increasing opposition against Christians who hold to what the Bible says?

It's easy to look inside for answers to life's problems, isn't it? Yet how quickly you realize you don't have the answers, because nothing good lives in you. That leaves you with nothing, but guilt and uncertainty. So you hide like the disciples expecting the worst of God's wrath for your sin, but then something strange happens. Jesus doesn't leave you uncertain. In his Word and Sacrament, he comes to you and says, **"Peace be with you."**

Even if life seems to be falling apart around you, Jesus is still there with his peace. He tells you, "I've come to bring you peace. I've come to free you of your fear and worry and guilt and uncertainty. You don't need to hide any longer. I'll take care of you. I paid for your sin and washed you clean of your guilt. I live, so my peace is yours now and forever."

Now someone was missing that first Easter Sunday. Where was Thomas? God's Word only tells us Thomas wasn't there. Sometime after Jesus left, Thomas returned. As soon as he stepped in the door, the disciples rushed up to him, **"We've seen the Lord!"** "You don't know what you're talking about! There's no way! Give me proof. **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.**" With that, Thomas dumped a bucket of water on the disciples' fire. There was no way he was going to believe what the disciples were saying unless he had physical proof that Jesus was alive. He refused to listen to them, because he was so filled with his own uncertainty.

It's easy to look down on Thomas, to think, "If that was me, I'd believe them." Yet his words sound awfully familiar, don't they? You and I run into doubt every day, but it's not as harmless as you think. In fact, doubt is so serious that it can even become a door to unbelief. For example, you hear God's promise of free forgiveness for your every sin, even for that sin that secretly bothers you every day, but you think, "There's no way God could forgive me for that sin." You hear God's promise of peace and certainty, when life seems so chaotic, but you think, "I have to see it to believe it". In those moments of doubt, Satan tempts you to dismiss God's promises as meaningless and powerless. That's why those words of Thomas sound so familiar. "Unless I see it, I'll never believe it", but where does that leave you? It leaves you uncertain of everything and plunging deeper into despair.

Jesus waited a week to answer Thomas. Sadly, we find the disciples hiding behind locked doors again. They were starting to think like Thomas again, so again Jesus appeared among them. Again he calmed them down with **"Peace be with you!"** This time, however, Jesus went right up to Thomas and held his hands out. "You want to see the nail marks in my hands. Here, look! You want to put your finger where the nails were. **Put your finger here.** You want to see the scar on my side. Here, **put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe.**" Jesus called him to repent. "See how foolish your unbelieving uncertainty was. You didn't believe my promises, but here's proof. I died, but now I live. **Stop doubting and believe!**"

Thomas didn't need further review. **"My Lord and my God!"** Thomas could doubt no longer, but that's because he actually saw Jesus. You and I don't get to see him, but Jesus wants us to be just as certain that he lives, so he promised, **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** Yes, on this side of heaven, you don't see Jesus in the flesh, but how blessed you are that the Holy Spirit still created faith in our hearts through his Word and the waters of Holy Baptism. How blessed you are to still receive all the same blessings as those who saw Jesus in the flesh.

When you're filled with uncertainty, Jesus comes to you through his Word and says, "Look at my perfect life. Look at my innocent death. Look at what I've done for you. See how I guided all of history to bring you peace. See how I removed your guilt, how I freed you of fear. I give you certainty, because I live." Jesus assures you through his body and blood in his Holy Supper, "See, I did rise from the dead. I didn't stay in the grave. My peace is sure. Your forgiveness is real." My friends, when uncertainty attacks, remember Jesus lives. In this chaotic world, the message of "Jesus lives" gives you peace. It guarantees the forgiveness of your every sin. The certain fact that "Jesus lives" leaves you blessed without a doubt!

That's why God recorded this account. He had John tell us, **"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."** Jesus wanted to give you further proof that he is the Son of God and that in him alone you have life. One day you'll see those marks on his hands and feet. You'll see the scar on his side. You'll look into his beautiful eyes and see his boundless love for you. There will be nothing uncertain about it. In the confidence of Jesus' resurrection, leave your uncertainty with the Savior, and in faith look to Jesus, who lives, just as he promised. Amen.