

Sermon – 04/24/22 (Confirmation Sunday)

Text – John 20:24-25

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

Theme – “Doubting Thomas”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In last Sunday’s Gospel lesson, we heard about Mary Magdalene’s Easter experience. She (and the other women) had set off early that morning — even before the sun was fully up — in order to finish Christ’s burial. They seen Jesus crucified and killed; they had watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take the body from the cross and (after getting permission from Pilate), bury it in Joseph’s own rock-hewn tomb; they knew that time had prevented the proper and complete ceremonies because the Sabbath was fast approaching. And so it was that they were there at the tomb that early Sunday morning. You will also remember that she (and the other women) were the first to see the resurrected Jesus that morning. And that they immediately ran to tell the apostles. But, St. Luke tells us, their report seemed like “*nonsense*” to the men. That is, they did not – they **would** not – believe it. Even after Peter and John run to the tomb and find it exactly as the women had said, they still would not believe.

When the Emmaus disciples return to bring word of their own experiences with Jesus later that Easter afternoon, their report is received a bit more respectfully. And yet there still was doubt. After all, how could a dead Man live? How could Someone who was beaten and crucified – and then thrust through with a spear – how could He NOT be dead? How could the

One forsaken by God Himself at the cross be risen and alive? No, it just is too much.

Of course, that all changes that Easter night when the apostles have their own first-hand encounter with the risen Jesus. He comes into their locked upper room, greets them (saying, “*Peace be with you!*”), and then shows them His hands and side. Now, isn’t that the very thing that Thomas demanded for himself in our text today? And that really is my point: Thomas is **no** different from all the rest. Even though we disparagingly call him “Doubting Thomas” he is no worse than Peter or Andrew or James or any of the rest. They ALL doubted. They ALL disbelieved. Until they saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes. So, can you blame Thomas for wanting the same thing? For demanding the same proof? For desiring the same blessing as the rest of the apostles? (pause)

Today is Confirmation Sunday in our little parish. We have one young man who will be asked to confirm what his parents and sponsors answered for him way back at his baptism. You might notice that the questions the pastor asks the confirmands are the same ones asked of the one who is being baptized. And that is because confirmation gives nothing that was not already theirs by baptism. Remember, it is baptism — not confirmation — that “...*works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation*”. It is baptism (not confirmation) which joins and unites us to Christ, making us members of His body. It is baptism (not confirmation) which makes us children of God and heirs of eternal life.

So, then, what is the point of confirmation? Why do we make such a big deal of it? Well, because now those young people will be making that confession publicly **themselves**. That they are poor miserable sinners who need a Savior. That Jesus Christ has lived and died and risen again for **their** salvation. That they believe all of God’s promises made to them

personally in their own baptism. That they will suffer all – even death – rather than deny or give up those gifts. Or, to use the words of Doubting Thomas after he had seen the risen Jesus – that He is THEIR God and THEIR Lord. So, let’s talk a little about all of that. (pause)

I mentioned earlier that those being confirmed are confessing their own sin and their need for a Savior. We get that from the first part of the Catechism – the Ten Commandments. How can you read through that long list of “*Thou shalt’s*” and “*Thou shalt not’s*” (and Luther’s wonderful explanation of what is included there) and NOT come to that horrifying conclusion? God tells us that He expects, demands, requires us to be perfect. All the time. In **all** our thoughts and words and deeds. Perfect. And, as I am sure Alex will tell you, he is not. We are not. No one is (except Jesus). We all fail. And even more horrifying is God’s verdict and judgment on those who do not measure up: hell. No “if’s, and’s, or but’s”.

However, after that first part of the Catechism and its frightening words of judgment comes the Gospel. In the Creed (the second “part” of the catechism) we hear and learn what **God** has done to fix it all for us. No, we are not perfect. We fail to keep the Law as God requires. But God – in the person of Jesus Christ – has done it all **for** us. He came down from heaven and lived for us, keeping the commandments perfectly and in our stead, giving US the credit. He went to the cross and carried the punishment WE deserve, as He suffered hell there in our place. He rose on Easter to prove it has been finished, and that we are redeemed (that is, bought back) by His work. He ascended into heaven to open its doors to all who believe this. And He sends His Holy Spirit to give us that faith (and keep us in that faith) as the Gospel is applied to us in His Word and Sacraments.

In the Lord’s Prayer (the third Chief Part) we learn to call God **OUR** Father. That is, we

have been brought home again – not by anything that we have done, but entirely by God’s work. And if He has done it all, then we can rest easy. We can trust Him. We can call Him our Father. We can bring Him all our needs and concerns, as well as those of others. We pray to Him, speaking as dear children to their dear Father, knowing He will hear and give us what is best.

In Baptism (the fourth part) we have been adopted into the family of God. Called by His name. Joined to Christ; literally made one with Him. What is His becomes ours. And that includes His righteousness and perfection, as well as an eternal place in His Kingdom.

When we sin (and we do, and will, every day) we have the peace of forgiveness given to us in the Office of the Keys (the fifth part of the catechism). As Jesus told the disciples that Easter night, He has given us (the Church) the authority to forgive sins. Because the Church is His Bride, so what is His is also hers. And so every week we come to church to hear Jesus (using the voice of the pastor) forgive us anew. What a treasure and blessing that is! That is why God tells us He wants to be here each week – not because He needs our money, or our prayers, or our worship (although those things DO form part of worship). But the most important part — the most vital and necessary thing — is so that He can give us that much-needed forgiveness, over and over and over again. What a joy, then, it is to be here and to receive that most precious gift!

And it is all sealed in the Lord’s Supper (the last part of the catechism). Here we are given -- into our own hands and mouths! -- the very Body and Blood of Christ. The same Body and Blood born of Mary. The same Body and Blood which kept the commandments for us. The same Body and Blood that were nailed to the cross for our salvation. The same Body and Blood that were raised on Easter. The same Body and Blood that stood before Mary and the Emmaus

disciples, before the apostles that Easter night, before Doubting Thomas the following Sunday night. The same Body and Blood which are ascended into heaven, and yet are here in/with/ under the bread and wine. And in that Body and Blood, we have *“forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation”* – everything that Christ came to win for us.

That, in a nutshell, is the Catechism. That, in short, is the Christian faith. That, in brief, is what Alex has studied and learned, and what he will be confessing with his own lips and mouth later this morning, confirming what was given him long ago at his baptism. (PAUSE)

The apostle Thomas must have felt a little bit cheated. After all, it seemed that everyone else had been given that chance to see the risen Jesus. To talk with Him. To reach out and touch Him. So, can you blame him for his words? Would you have believed had you been in his place? After all, we know dead men do not get up out of their graves. We know that crucified men do not cheat death. We know that Jesus WAS dead – the Romans made no mistakes when it came to such things. That’s why they pushed that spear into His side, even after they thought He was dead – just to make sure.

No, Jesus certainly was dead. There was no doubt there. So, when Thomas was told that Jesus was alive, what seems more likely: that those others were right, or that Jesus remained dead? And so he uttered those infamous words: *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*

Well, you know how Jesus put an end to Thomas’ doubt. He came, just for him. He showed Thomas His hands and feet, His side. He invited Thomas to touch and see, to KNOW. How could Thomas doubt anymore? How could he deny any more? Christ had come -- to him and for him. To save HIM.

In the same way Jesus comes to us. He comes to us, showing us His wounds which have paid the price for our sin. Isn't that exactly what happens when we hear His Word? He comes to give us peace, as we have been cleansed in the water and Word of baptism, as that forgiveness is given again and again in the absolution. And He comes to us, inviting us to handle His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. To touch Him and know. To stop doubting and believe.

This morning, as Alex make that confession of **his** faith, we join him. We join Thomas. We join Mary, we join the Emmaus disciples, we join the other apostles, we join all Christians of all times and places. With them we confess of Jesus: **my** Lord and **my** God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen

8:00 – Nicene Creed

FE – Offertory/Prayers

11:00 – Rite of Confirmation