Text: John 20:19-31

**Text**

The story of Thomas is always the story for the 2nd Sunday in Easter. Someone got real literal when picking it. The first part of the story takes place on Easter Sunday – “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week…”. But Thomas was not there that day. But “8 days later” – you might wonder where that 8 comes from, its counting vs. measuring again, they include the original Sunday in the count, it’s one of the places where for us the translators really should give up their hyper-literalness and just go with “but the next Sunday Thomas was with them.” So we get Thomas every Easter 2.

And contrary to the impression one might get from a guy who can walk through closed doors, the Thomas story has a hyper-literalness about it. They that literalness is put in the service of something that is beyond the reality of our 5 senses.

When Jesus shows up – walks through the locked door – he pronounces 4 things to the disciples.

The first thing that he says to the disciples is “peace be with you.” Now you can take that as a common greeting – “shalom” – but it is this peace that Jesus chooses to emphasize. After he gives them his peace he grounds it by “showing them his hands and his side.”

And I think that we might remember a couple of things. The last time these guys saw Jesus they were either: running away from him in the Garden of Gethsemane, betraying him swearing a blue streak, or maybe you can say the John stood at the foot of the cross. The women came back and told them about the angel and the empty tomb and meeting Jesus, but you could ask what does that mean? If the dead man you all betrayed at some level really is alive, what are his intentions? The are behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, but I wonder if there might be some other fear there as well.

But with Jesus there is no need to fear. He has come to give you peace. The wounds were for you. The secured our peace with heaven eternally. And just in case we didn’t hear it the first time. When they are all done inspecting the very real body with very real nail and spear marks, Jesus says again “Peace be with you.”

God leads with his good news. The 10 commandments are preceded by the Exodus. Israel is delivered from bondage. “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the House of Slavery.” We have all been liberated form our war with God. Our sinful self that daily struggles against God in every way imaginable, Christ has come to us on that cross and says that struggle is over. “Peace be with you.” I’ve paid for all those sins and betrayals. Do not fear them. They have been removed and forgotten.

But when one has been freed, the question then is how shall we live?

And Jesus give to those disciples three answers. He’s freed us for a purpose.

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The Father sent Jesus to proclaim peace to the nations (Zech 9:10). More than proclaim it, to procure it. And now, those who have seen the peace of God are sent out with the same message. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.” Those disciples and anyone after them are called to carry this message of peace with God.

But how is this message to be enabled?

First, “receive the Holy Spirit”. How shall we live? In the light of the Holy Spirit. How does the peace of God come to us? By the Word through the work of the Holy Spirit. How do we proclaim peace to the world that prefers war? By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There is no way that we can do any of this by our own means. There is no way that anyone would hear such a proclamation naturally. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to call and gather, to enlighten and sanctify. When Jesus says receive the Holy Spirit, he is giving to these disciples – and to us – the divine life. Living the peace of God we can become partners with him building that peace both in our lives and in the Kingdom.

Second, what is the first word? It’s the offer of forgiveness. “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven, if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” Do note that this is a two-edged proclamation. We are sent to proclaim peace, but it our peace does not rest on the house, take it back and shake the dust. The peace of God is the forgiveness of the 10,000 talents. So we shouldn’t be jumping to extract our 100 denarii. But some people don’t think they owe 10,000 talents. Some people might know they owe, but they are still trying to work it out, refinance that debt. The mission of God given here is not to forgive those who don’t think they need it. No, they are still at war with God. And the clear word – you sins are bound – is the best thing we could do for them. But the first word, like Jesus, is the word of forgiveness. “Peace be with you.” And as long as we seek repentance, that peace rests, 70x7.

**Thomas**

But Thomas was not there. The rest of the disciples have disciples have decided that he’s the guy they’ve got to bring around. So they are pestering him “We’ve seen the LORD.” And I think you can imagine everything they might have been sharing. Thomas, you should have been there, he walked through the door. Thomas, you should have seen his hands and side. Thomas, we’ve got things to do, stop whatever it is you are doing and let’s get busy. And eventually Thomas just loses it.

And this is one of the places where I think our translators have been too soft. It is more like an exasperated Thomas back to his buddies, “Look, unless I myself thrust by fingers into those nail paths, and jamb my hand into the side. I’m not believing a word. Never.”

Why do I think that is much more appropriate? Because Jesus – consistent with the sometimes mercurial and blunt Jesus we sometimes see in the gospels – tells Thomas exactly this. “Thomas, bring your fingers here. And Bring your hand here. Stop you foolish pigheaded unbelief and believe.” And Thomas in that moment is stuck by the ridiculousness of the demand. I demand that God let me thrust my fingers and hands into the wounds that brought me peace. Thomas realizes maybe the pettiness of his rejection of his fellow disciples testimony. Thomas exclaims – not at all reaching out with those fingers and hands, sufficiently upbraided – “My LORD and my God.”

**Application**

Doubting Thomas is the wrong word. Thomas doesn’t doubt. He just doesn’t believe. And he’s got his reasons. Everybody that doesn’t believe has their reasons. It breaks what I know. It’s inconvenient. It’s just not for me. It doesn’t really do anything. There are almost as many reasons for unbelief and there are unbelievers.

But the Thomas story is a hinge for us. Because we are the heirs of the call. The Peace of Christ has come to us. The Holy Spirit dwells here and in the Word and Sacrament. And we are to live that peace. But we live that peace in the midst of world that doesn’t believe. Not that the world doubts, it just doesn’t believe.

But unlike Thomas whom Jesus makes a special trip so that he see him, the world doesn’t receive that special trip. The world receives us. “As the father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Thomas might have believed because he saw, but I think when he saw, what he felt was that mixture of shame of what his demands had been and how he had treated his fellows. And it doesn’t require thrusting our hands into the side of Christ to feels those. Whether it is the shame of what our actions have cost us and our loved ones. Or the shame of where we ourselves have ended up. Or some hidden shame that we don’t want out. We don’t need a post-resurrection appearance to feels those. We probably all feels those. And if we don’t’ as Luther quipped we probably should check if we still have a heartbeat.

No, what we need in that situation is the “shalom.” Peace be with you. Let me tell you about the one who carried all of that shame and took it away. In the same moment that Thomas felt the shame be saw the answer – “My Lord and My God.”

Our Lord and Our God has given us his peace. Stop disbelieving and believe.

Believe, that you might have life in his name. Believe, you’ve got a new life to live. Amen.