Text: John 20:19-31

**Introduction**

I’ve been told that the most common Sunday for preachers to take vacation on is the Sunday after Easter. And the typical reason given is simply that the Christmas to Easter season is packed that by the end of it, you need a week off simply to be a vegetable. But every year it dawns on me too late that the real reason is the assigned texts for the day. You can try and explain the full communism now of Acts 4, you can wade into the word salad of 1 John – we are going to do that in Bible Study a bit later, or you can go from the highs of Easter to pondering the doubting Thomas. Someone remind me next year to schedule this Sunday off.

Text

But that doesn’t help me right now. So, let’s ponder the gospel lesson today. Which is what some people think was an original ending to the entire gospel. We’ll talk a bit about that later.

The reading has three different movements or scenes. The first movement is on Easter Sunday proper. The disciples – all except Thomas – are gathered, but they are gathered in fear. “The doors were locked for fear of the Jews.” And I think that is simply the fear that not really believing what Jesus had told them before, it had dawned on the disciples that the Chief Priests might want to finish the job. Clean up this Jesus and John the Baptist movement by taking out a few more of the core following. Early in the morning Mary Magdalene had informed Peter and John that Jesus was not in the tomb. The two disciples had run there and found it as she said, and John tells us that they believed. But they go home and we find them in this fearful state by the end of the day.

**Picture of Spiritual Life**

Into that fear Jesus appears to them. And does a series of things. The first thing that Jesus does is allow his peace to rest upon the disciples. He does this by allowing each of those disciples to observe his hands and side.

Now not every Christian – not most Christians, which is the point of the Thomas episode – gets to see the hands and the side. But I think there is still a general rule about the spiritual life here. The peace of Christ has to become real to us first. Before anything else happens, the fact that those wounds are for us has to be internalized. We can be told that the Father wishes Peace with us. We can see the cross and observe the resurrection. But both of those things could have us fearful. They certainly did old Martin Luther. The cross simply meant judgement. You could look at those wounds and not believe that God means peace. Not believe that they were for us. But these disciples “were glad when they saw the LORD.”

It is John’s Gospel that has Jesus tell another fearful person who comes to him at night that “you must be born again.” And that new birth is connected the famous passage of John 3:16 that “God so loved the world that he gave his only son.” The Spiritual life truly begin with that peace, with the faith that the wounds of the Son of God are for us and have bought us peace with God the Father. And Jesus understands that this might not be an immediate thing. We might even have to return to this basic fact more than once. Return to the font, return to that new birth, and remember – reclaim – the promise. Peace be with you.

When that milk of the spiritual life has done it work, Jesus tells those disciples again “Peace be with you.” But he then commissions them, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The Christian life is not one that is lived behind closed doors in fear. Not even fear of the cross. The Christian life, when one has been born again, is a life of calling. Jesus came to reveal the Peace of the Father to us, and we are sent into the same world to reveal the love of Jesus to it.

Now that step is probably one of fear and trembling. Going alone should terrify anyone. They killed Jesus, what do we think they’ll do to us. But even beyond that what exactly is the message. What is the best message to proclaim the love of God? And in his last words here Jesus answers both of those problems. First he says “receive the Holy Spirit.” The same Spirit that Jesus was anointed with and did his entire ministry with, he has given to us. We are never alone in these things. The Spirit is always their to testify. And then he gives the core proclamation, “your sins are forgiven.” If you want to get fancy this the third place that Jesus gives to us the Keys of the Kingdom. But the peace of God is proclaimed in the forgiveness of sins. Those wounds are not in judgement, but for mercy. And God’s mercy is given through the means of sinners. If we know how much we have been forgiven, how much more should we be anxious to proclaim that forgiveness?

So I think you’ve got a picture of the Spiritual life here: Personal New Birth, Calling, and Spirit Empowered Living.

**The Problem of the New Birth**

And you can see it immediately in how the disciples act. They immediately go out and exercise their calling finding Thomas and telling him. “We have seen the LORD.”

This doesn’t go as they might have hoped. It just get Thomas riled up. Look, unless I thrust my hand into his side, I’m not going to believe it.

And I think this is the frustrating thing about that new birth. If you’ve been called and you are living the Spirit filled life, why can’t you just give it to someone else. I’ve got a friend who is constant saying to people “you need Jesus.” And he’s absolutely right. The world needs Jesus. But telling the World that often just gets it wound up. The world is still living in fear. It does not have the Spirit. It knows it is still at war with God. And until someone can prove that the peace of God is present, it will not believe.

Faith itself is this ongoing miracle. Because unlike Thomas and those first disciples, none of us have that resurrected Christ right there to see the path marks of the nails. But the new birth has never been about seeing. The new birth was never a physical thing. The new birth is about faith in the promises of God becoming real to us. We always think seeing is believing, but what Thomas and the gospel of John would insist is that believing is seeing. What you believe will impact what you see. If you believe that Christ has poured out his Holy Spirit, and sent us just as he himself was sent, then the communion of saints – this communion of saints – is the body of Christ. And this body of Christ daily presents itself to the Thomas’ of the World. Daily the proclamation of the Spiritual life is “stop disbelieving, and believe.” And this is how God works in this world. You see the body of Christ, after that new birth has come. It was always there, like those disciples to Thomas during the week. But then in faith you see.

**Conclusion**

So, if the first scene is a Picture of the spiritual life from new birth to life with the Spirit.

And the 2nd scene with Thomas is how that new birth is the ongoing miracle of faith. A picture of how the church as a whole works in this world.

John seems to be wrapping up. “Jesus did many other signs…which are not in this book.” And we’d love to have those too. Which is probably why John doesn’t actually end here. He himself is reminded of a couple more he has to add. We love to tell the story, because we know it’s true. But even adding a couple more, there are others. But I think this ending coming after a picture of personal belief, and of how the church works, is imagining all the ways that it fails. We always seem to end up back behind closed doors afraid.

And John’s little ending is to remind us of the one important thing. “These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ…and that by believing you may have life.” This is the expression of what the Augsburg confession calls the “Satis Est”. That’s Latin for It is enough. Article 7 on The Church states, “To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.” What is that doctrine of the gospel? That Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life. That is the unity of the church.

The church keeps finding itself afraid and behind doors. And then Christ comes in her midst – in Word and Sacrament – and we have the unity. Then hearts are brave again and arms are strong. Then she has life. Stop disbelieving and believe.