

SERMON FOR APRIL 11, 2021

TEXT: JOHN 20: 19-31

THEME: FAITH THAT REPLACES FEAR

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." **24** Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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." **26** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

In the name of the Risen One:

Mark Twain was in London in 1897 as part of a speaking tour around the world. He had considerable debts in the US and he had hoped to earn enough money to pay off all of his debts.

While in London, a rumor started that he was seriously ill. This was followed by a rumor that he was dead. An American Newspaper printed Twain's obituary. When he was asked about all of this by a reporter, Twain replied, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." The fact of the matter is that even this story is an exaggeration.

The fact of the matter is that an American journalist, Frank Marshall White contacted Twain by cable while he was in London to ask about Twain's health, and then later, to ask for a comment from Twain about reports that he was on his deathbed. Twain replied: "I can understand perfectly how the report of my illness got about, I have even heard on good authority that I was dead. A cousin was ill in London two or three weeks ago, but is well now. The report of my illness grew out of this illness, the report of my death was an exaggeration."

The news of Jesus' resurrection, was it true, or an exaggeration? That is what the Apostle Thomas thought, but I would imagine he wasn't the only one. The news of Jesus' resurrection, could it possibly be true, or is it an exaggeration, wishful thinking on the part of the apostles.

It is the night of the first Easter. The disciples were huddled together to try to sort things out. There were reports swirling about Jesus' sightings.

Mary Magdalene reportedly saw Jesus outside the tomb. But she wasn't the only one. Jesus paid a visit to some disciples on the road to Emmaus. Peter and John had told the group of their foot race to the tomb, only to find the tomb empty.

But here they are, behind locked doors. Why? Because they were afraid. "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,"

Why were they afraid? Well, they had seen their Lord crucified at the hands of an angry mob. Jesus had warned them that His followers could expect the same treatment, for Jesus said, "A servant is not greater than his master, and if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." It only stands to reason that these disciples were behind locked doors.

But news of Jesus' resurrection? That was a bit much. They certainly saw Jesus die, and He was placed in a previously unused tomb, with a Roman guard around to protect thieves from stealing His body. The news of Jesus' death was not an exaggeration, but to come alive again? To be resurrected? They all believed that Jesus would rise again on the Last Day, that was the common belief of the Jews back then, but to rise from the grave now? On that

first Easter? Was the resurrection of Jesus an exaggeration by overly enthusiastic followers?

But John and the other Gospel writers say no. In fact, John records: “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” They saw the risen Lord, the nail marks in His hands, the spear mark in His side. Fear was replaced by faith. Their hearts and minds were at peace. They rejoiced. It wasn’t an exaggeration. Jesus had risen, just as He said. Jesus was alive!

Thomas, though, had his doubts, much like the others did a week before. Thomas was afraid of being let down again. He had placed his hopes in Jesus, only to see those hopes come tumbling down. Fool me once, shame on you, thought Thomas, fool me twice, shame on me. Thomas wasn’t about to be fooled again. But ironically, he was, for the very next week, the disciples are huddled together, this time Thomas is with them. They once again are behind locked doors. And then Jesus appears! He came to tell Thomas, and to remind the others once again that the news of His resurrection was not an exaggeration. “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” **27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my**

hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The disciples probably thought that they had good reason to be afraid, but Jesus revealed Himself as the Living One, the Resurrected One. Fear was replaced by faith in the One who died and rose again.

What are some of the things that cause you to fear today? The things that cause you to doubt the love of God, to question whether the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection has any meaning for you today? We live in a world today that is marked by fear and anxiety. I heard recently that anxiety has taken the country by storm, and it isn’t just because of Covid. There is still anxiety about the virus, but also there is anxiety about the present, the uncertain future. More people are taking medication for anxiety this year, more so than in the past. We are living in uncertain times, times that cause us to fear.

Maybe your fear is more having to do with what others think of you. Maybe you are afraid of letting someone you love down, of disappointing them. Or perhaps you are fearful of what might happen because of your past mistakes or sins. There are a lot of reasons as to why you may be afraid today.

But God's Good News for you today is that Christ is risen for you. Just as Thomas and the others saw the nail holes in Jesus' hands and feet, and the mark of the spear in His side, so too those marks and imprints still there for you. The crucified Christ is risen for you. He lived for you, He was nailed to the cross for you. He suffered for you. He Died for you. And He lives for you today. To give you peace. He replaces your fear, whatever that fear might be, with faith in Him.

Just as God the Father breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living being, so too God the Holy Spirit has breathed faith in your Lord Jesus Christ into your life. Jesus lives to cast away all your fear. He comes to you today to say to you: "Peace be with you." Jesus has come to give you His peace and Jesus gives peace to you. Today. As you hear His Word. As you come to the altar to receive His body and blood. The Risen Christ comes to you to bring you peace. The peace of forgiveness, an abundant life in Christ who loves you, the promise of eternal salvation for you and all who believe. For just as Jesus replaced the disciples' fear with faith, so too He delivers you from your fears so that you can live your life with confidence in Christ. For Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

Amen