**April 19, 2020 John 20:24-31**

***Doubt No More***

**Scripture:** John 20:24-31 NRSV

*(24)But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (26)A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, 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. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt 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 come to believe." (30)Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. (31)But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

**Notes:**

1. One cannot ***focus*** on the Son when we are busy ***focusing*** on ourselves.
   1. Thomas recognizes Jesus as Lord and identifies him as ***God***.
   2. Jesus blesses those who ***believe*** in him.
   3. Doubt is an intellectual problem; ***faith*** is overcome by ***evidence***.
   4. Unbelief is a moral issue; we simply ***refuse*** to believe.
2. We need to take a look in the **mirror**; have we refused to believe?
   1. It is hard to believe in things that take us from our ***comfort*** ***zone***.
   2. When we resist the Lord, we ***refuse*** to accept his ***blessings***
   3. ***Unbelief*** robs us of blessings and opportunities.
3. We all live by ***faith***.
   1. Listen to ***Jesus*** this morning.
   2. ***Believe*** in Jesus and the ***power*** of His resurrection.
   3. Jesus speaks to ***each*** of ***us*** individually;
4. What are you going to do in ***response*** to His word?
   1. We are ***called*** to teach, making disciples, and baptize.
   2. We are the ***hands*** and ***feet*** of Christ; ***GO***!!!
   3. ***Share*** the message of Jesus to ***all*** who are seeking and will listen.

**Transcript:**

In my life I have been the brunt of many jokes, practical jokes intended to make me look foolish; stories to make fun of me and my own idiosyncrasies, and pranks that were meant to have a laugh. And many times, I was willing to stand there and be the one they were laughing at. At least I wasn’t being ignored, right?

But there comes a time when we cannot accept being made fun of any longer; there comes a time when we will not stand to be the brunt of practical jokers. Eventually we all get to a point where we want to be treated with honor and respect.

And that brings us to our passage today, in John 20:24-29. As I look at this passage I wonder, what makes a man who is struggling with the death of a very close friend, snap on the only friends he has left. I get the feeling; Thomas feels as if the disciples are playing a cruel practical joke on him. And he makes a statement, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” (John 20:25)

So today I ask that you pick up your bibles, turn with me to John 20:24-29, and share in the reading of God’s word.

John 20:24-31 NRSV (24)But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (26)A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, 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. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt 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 come to believe." (30)Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. (31)But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Immediately when some people read this the first thing they wonder is why Thomas was not with the other disciples in the locked room the first time Jesus appeared. Was he out running some sort of errand for the rest of the group? Was he on his way and just hadn’t arrived yet? Was he so disappointed with the way everything worked out that he just couldn’t stand to be with his friends just yet? Was he so deeply broken inside, heartbroken to his core over Jesus death, that he couldn’t bring himself to be there? Did Thomas just need some down time, time to be alone?

Or could it be there were other reasons that Thomas wasn’t there? Perhaps Thomas was afraid; but his statement in John 11:16 doesn’t lead us to believe such a thing. Remember When Lazarus lie dead in his tomb; and Jesus said he would be returning to Lazarus home; it was Thomas who said, “Let us go, that we may die with Him.” This doesn’t sound like a man who was afraid. But that doesn’t mean his emotions had not changed.

Maybe Thomas didn’t care about spiritual matters; maybe he had something more important to do. Thomas had always been genuinely interested in the truth. He wasn’t afraid to ask the questions everybody else wondered about but were afraid to ask. A perfect example is in John 14:5 where Jesus is talking about going away; saying that the disciples could someday be with him again and they would know where to find him. This is where Thomas speaks up saying, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Over the years Thomas has been given a bad reputation, for being a bit of a pessimist. He is referred to as doubting Thomas, and many times that is how he is remembered. But I tend to lean more towards the side of him wanting to see evidence before he buys into what is being said. And so he says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” And being a realist much like Thomas I can understand where he is coming from. Fool me once shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. I can hear him saying it, “you guys have pulled pranks on me too many times to fall for something like this. I saw him suffer, I saw him cry out in pain; I saw the nails penetrating his hands and feet; I saw the soldier stick a spear in his side, I know he was dead. I watched as they lay him in the tomb and place the spices over him. He was dead; so you are not pulling this on me.”

Now some of you are probably saying something like; but Jesus told them that this was all going to happen; Jesus said he must die and then be brought back to life; He said he would come, don’t you remember. Yes, I remember this, but I also know that when somebody loses another to death, especially a death as violent and traumatic as Jesus’, we tend to lose our ability to remember the tiniest of details and the words he spoke to us; we are not focusing on what Jesus promised, we are only focusing on our own hurts and guilt. So, this must be why Thomas doesn’t remember. Last week I made the observation after the sunrise service that we cannot properly focus on the Son when we are busy focusing on our self. And right now, in this story, Thomas is focusing on himself, his hurts, his loss, and what his future will hold and look like. SO, yeah, I believe he cannot remember the promises Jesus made.

And we see Thomas making his statements of doubt and stated he would not believe unless he saw and touched the wounds on Jesus body. A week passes and again on a Sunday evening, as the group is gathered together in the locked room, with Thomas present this time; Jesus enters the room again and greets them with “Peace be with you.” The scripture doesn’t say much to the disciples reaction this time, this is at least the fourth time that Jesus has showed himself; to Mary at the tomb, to Cleopas and another on the road to Emmaus, one week earlier to the disciples in the locked room, and now in the same locked room; he reveals himself again.

For Thomas, I have to wonder was he taken back, was he surprised? Did he have anything to say to the Lord? Unfortunately, the scripture does not record any dialog except the words of Jesus as he turns to Thomas and says, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” With that Thomas answers him with words more profound than any other, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas not only recognizes Jesus as the Lord of his life, but also identifies him as God, the same god who made all creation. Yes they all were saying he was the Messiah but nobody that I am aware of until this point, Identified Jesus as God, our God in flesh and blood.

But now the difficult words come, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” Thomas stated he would not believe unless he could see Jesus. I can imagine how Thomas heard this… “Thomas, for three years we walked this earth together. Now because you watched me die you find it hard to believe that I was here. You have seen me do greater things than these; water into wine, casting demons out of human bodies, feeding more than 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread, calming the raging sea, not to mention raising Lazarus back to life. I have been with you from the beginning and I will be with you always. How many times have we heard him say something like, “Oh you of little faith.” But then Jesus ends the dialog in this story with this beatitude, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Jesus is blessing those people who have come to believe in him as the Lord and Savior of their lives without ever seeing him without every seeing his smiling face; those who have come to believe that Jesus is God without ever seeing him in the flesh.

SO what? What does that mean to me; I believe, I have been forgiven, and I have never seen him in the flesh; I am blessed. What is there that Thomas would not believe; and what did he have doubts about? This week I came across these descriptions of doubt and disbelief. Doubt is often an intellectual problem; we want to believe, but faith is overwhelmed by all the opposing views, overwhelmed by problems and questions. Disbelief or unbelief is a moral issue; we simply refuse to believe; we refuse to allow the concept of something beyond our control to be believable.

Thomas must have heard the testimony of Mary when she came back from the tomb on that resurrection morning. He most likely heard the testimony of the two men traveling with Jesus to Emmaus. Then when the ten remaining disciples of Jesus tell him that the Lord had showed himself to them, he cannot believe? And then to state that in order for him to believe, he would have to see and touch the wounds. It makes me wonder if there was another underlying issue here.

But instead of trying to decipher his motive and purpose; we need to take a look in the mirror. How often have we refused to believe? How often have we asked for a sign and even after we are given a sign we still do not believe? You see in our hearts we find it difficult to believe in things that will take us out of our comfort zones. We do not believe in the things that are calling us to step out on faith and do something. How many times have you heard the voice of the Lord and you turned a deaf ear because the words you were hearing were not the ones you wanted to hear? How many times has the Lord asked you to speak to somebody but you hid behind your shyness and embarrassment? How many times have you seen the right thing to do, but left the moment pass because it was not your responsibility? “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

I remember when I was first saved the Lord pressed upon my mind the need for me to be giving a tithe. You all know what a tithe is; 10 % of what the Lord gives you, that you give back to the Lord, in the form of an offering to the church. We collect tithes and offerings every week. But when I was first saved, I was hesitant; I wanted to get my student loans paid off, I wanted to buy a piece of ground to build a home on; I wanted to get established. You know what, I didn’t give the tithe, and the Lord did not bless me, instead I followed my desires and wound up in deeper debt. But after Jan and I were married; I said to her, “I believe we need to pay a tithe, and an offering for other areas on top of that. Now you may not believe this; the Lord blessed us in ways I could not have imagined. We were able to pay off student loans early, we were able to get my credit card debt paid off; and we were able to build a home on that property; and we did it all within four years. When finances seemed to be going south, we focused on paying our tithes first and somehow the money that we needed to stay ahead always seemed to show up. I have no physical evidence that this was because of our faithfulness in paying our tithes, but that is where I am giving the Lord credit. That is my example. I have no physical evidence to justify what I have seen; but in my heart I know it was the Lord’s doing.

Thomas reminds us that unbelief robs us of blessings and opportunities. It may sound sophisticated, smart, and intellectual to question what Jesus did, but such questions are usually evidence of hard hearts, not of searching minds. Thomas represents the "scientific approach" to life; and it doesn’t always work. When a skeptic says, "I will not believe unless-" he is already admitting that he does believe! He believes in the validity of the test or experiment that he has devised! If he has faith in his own "scientific approach," then why can he not have faith in what God is revealing?

We all live by faith. The question is what is the object of our faith? Christians put their faith in God and His Word, while unsaved people put their faith in themselves. Listen to Jesus this morning? He rebukes Thomas and says, "…don’t be faithless, but be believing". This morning, will you heed this same rebuke? Believe in Jesus and the power of His resurrection today. (John 20:31) You see, in the last verses of this chapter there is a statement "(30)Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. (31)But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." Jesus speaks to you individually; and what you hear this morning in this message may be something completely different than what somebody else ay hear. This is the voice of God, of Jesus, and of the holy Spirit speaking to you and only you. Can you hear his voice speaking to you? Do you believe that this is the word of God? Then what are you going to do in response to this word. My prayer is that you will be obedient. What do you have to fear?

We are the church of Jesus Christ. We are called to go into all of the world; teaching and making disciples of those who will listen and believe; baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are the hands and feet of Christ; go; go into the community and find ways to help those who are in need; go and find ways to supply the needs of those who are without; go, and share the message of Jesus to all who will listen and those who are seeking.

Let us pray.