

Thomas' Unbelief Concerning Christ's Resurrection.

Text: John 20:19-31

Suggested Hymns:

395, 329, 765, 103, 321

1) How outspoken and, at the same time, how

unreasonable was his unbelief

2) How the Lord rebukes him and, at the same time, convinces him of His resurrection.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 20:19–31, *¹⁹ Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, 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 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!”

²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” ²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Two manifestations of the risen Lord are recorded in our Gospel. The first manifestation took place on the day of Christ's resurrection and the second, eight days after.

Who could describe the feelings of joy felt by the whole assembly of Christ's disciples, when their Lord and Master suddenly appeared in their midst, while they were gathered together, behind closed and bolted doors, on the evening of the day of His resurrection?

Did they expect Him this night and did they meet for this purpose? Hardly. But they knew that He was risen from the dead. The women who had been at the sepulchre early in the morning to anoint His body had found the sepulchre empty and had seen a vision of angels, saying that Jesus was alive.

Mary Magdalene had seen Him and spoken to Him. Simon Peter had seen Him. The two disciples of Emmaus had just arrived and reported how the risen Lord had walked with them to Emmaus and how He was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

At different places the Lord had appeared on this day, but most of His disciples had not seen Him as yet. O how great must have been their joy when suddenly, in the stillness of their assembly, they heard His familiar voice, saying, "*Peace be with you,*" and when they looked up they saw Jesus standing in their midst!

This was His first manifestation in their assembly after His resurrection. And it was characterised by something peculiar. We are told, "*²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

In the most clear terms Christ gives to His disciples, that is, to His Church upon earth, the power to forgive sins. This is the foundation of the doctrine of absolution. This doctrine, according to which sins are to be forgiven by mortal man in the name of Christ, is an undeniable doctrine of Christ and gives great consolation.

But we shall not enter in detail upon this comforting doctrine today. There is another Sunday in the Church Year¹ which is devoted to the contemplation of this doctrine.

We shall apply our attention to the second part of our Gospel which treats of the unbelieving disciple Thomas in particular, and tells how the risen Lord, in His second manifestation, on this very day, the Sunday after Easter, healed this straying sheep of His flock of his unbelief.

Accordingly, let us consider with the help of God's Holy Spirit, Thomas' Unbelief Concerning Christ's Resurrection. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How Outspoken And, At The Same Time, How Unreasonable Was The Unbelief Of Thomas

We read, ²⁴ *Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”* When Christ appeared to His disciples the first time, on the day of His resurrection, all were present except Thomas.

We are not told what was the reason of his absence. But his conduct may give us a clue. His conduct shows that he must have been on the point of severing his connection with his fellow disciples. Doubts had arisen in his mind concerning Christ, who had died on the cross.

And while the other disciples had the same doubts, his case was more severe. He had evidently made up his mind that their cause was hopelessly lost, since their Master was dead. Why, then, should he go to their assembly?

Perhaps he thought within himself, *‘What foolishness to meet in a group and run the risk of being arrested by the officials! I will have nothing to do with this thing and will not identify myself with these disciples any longer.’*

Still, Thomas was not so far gone as to betray his fellow disciples, not so far gone as to tread in the footsteps of Judas, to go to the chief priests and elders and to tell them, *'I also was a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, but now I renounce Him; and I am at your service, if you can make any use of me.'*

No; Thomas is still on good terms with the other disciples. They meet him and say, ***"We have seen the Lord."*** They say to him, *'Thomas, the Lord is really risen from the dead. The rumours about His resurrection have proven true. He appeared in our midst. We have seen Him with our own eyes, and with our own ears we heard His sweet voice.'*

In short, they related to him in detail all that came to pass in Christ's first manifestation after His resurrection. And what does Thomas say? Does he believe? Is his heart filled with joy at the Lord's resurrection?

No; stubbornly he adheres to his doubts and says, ***"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."***

He would say, *"Do you think that I am so credulous as to deem it possible for a man who is dead to be moving among the living? Did I not see from a distance how His hands and feet were pierced with nails and how, after His death on the cross, one of the soldiers ran his spear into His side, producing a wound which necessarily would have killed Him, had He not already been dead, an ugly, gaping wound, large enough to lay a hand into it? Let me tell you, then, I will not believe that He is alive until I shall place my finger in the print of the nails and thrust my hand in His open side."*

So outspoken was the unbelief of Thomas that he would not believe the report of his fellow disciples, despite of what they said.

See how unreasonable his unbelief was. His fellow disciples were trustworthy men and not given to falsehood. This he knew. There was no reason whatever to doubt their words. It was wrong to discredit their statements. It was unreasonable to be suspicious in the face of their integrity and their emphatic assurances.

But this unbelieving Thomas has his followers at all times. O how many people who had been Jesus' true disciples for a time became offended in Christ because of His deep humiliation, shunned the assembly of their fellow Christians,

and drifted away upon the waves and billows of their own unreasonable doubts and unbelief!

“We have seen the Lord,” these words of Christ’s disciples are addressed to all of us. The Lord’s chosen apostles bear witness to all those things that the Saviour did and said. Jesus did not Himself write and publish a book containing His doctrine. But the Gospel which He preached and the work which He performed has been handed down to us by His chosen disciples, by His order and command. ¹⁶***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.***²

And it is written for all generations to the end of the world in that divine book, the Holy Scriptures. The apostles were with the Lord Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. They were eyewitnesses of what He did. They accompanied Him wherever He went. They heard His sayings. They witnessed His miracles.

“We have seen the Lord,” believe in Him, all generations, this is what His disciples proclaim in the New Testament.

And what do the unbelieving Thomases say? To this day they reply, *‘Had our own eyes seen the miracles that are ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament, the healings of the sick, and the lame, and the maimed, and the blind, the stilling of the storm, the feeding of thousands with a few loaves of bread, the calling forth of the dead, and all those wonderful deeds which, it is alleged, Christ performed - had we ourselves witnessed all those wonderful things presumably connected with His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, then would we not hesitate a moment, but believe in Him forthwith.*

But these things we did not see. They are unbelievable. They are inconsistent with the common order of things in this world. And therefore we do not believe.’

Have these unbelievers who discredit the statements of the Bible any sound reason, any just cause to justify their unbelief? No; their unbelief is just as unreasonable as was that of Thomas, to whom the disciples said, **“We have seen the Lord.”**

The writers of the New Testament were men who were both able and willing to give a truthful statement, to present things exactly as they were. They were

able to do this because they themselves had seen those things and had heard what Christ said.

And they were willing to tell the truth, since they were honest and upright men who would rather die than deviate from the truth. Had the disciples been men of dubious character, or had they gained some temporal advantage by the preaching of the Gospel, then perhaps we might suspect that they were impostors and had made up this story to gratify their own ambition, or to fill their pockets.

But what earthly benefit did the apostles reap from the preaching of the Gospel? Did they gain any earthly advantage thereby? Did they gain fame, honour before men, riches, worldly possessions? No; they were hated, ridiculed, persecuted, banished, tortured, and put to death for their testimony.

Who ever heard that a man with a rational mind would make up a lie and maintain that lie, that he might suffer and be put to death, while he could save his life if he told the truth? The apostles sealed with their own heart's blood the truthfulness of their report.

2. How The Lord Rebukes Thomas And, At The Same Time, Convinces Him Of His Resurrection.

And now, having heard how outspoken and, at the same time, how unreasonable was Thomas' unbelief, let us consider how the Lord rebuked and, at the same time, convinced him of His resurrection.

We read, ²⁶ *And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"*

"Peace to you." This expression is to this day is the common form of greeting among the nations in the East. But in the mouth of Jesus it signifies more. He is the Prince of peace, and where He is faithfully received, there strife and discord must depart and peace prevail.

O let us remember this, my hearers; where there is not peace, where there is strife and discord among relatives, those of the same kin hating one another, husband and wife chiding one another, children and parents opposing one another, there Jesus cannot remain, and a peaceless heart cannot retain the true faith in the risen Lord, who is the Prince of peace.

But what do we hear of Christ after He has greeted His disciples? ²⁷ *Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”* How wonderful!

The Lord knows everything and all that came to pass within the last eight days between Thomas and the rest of the disciples. We are not told that He appeared to any of them. But He knows every word that Thomas spoke. He knows his very thoughts. He knows all about his doubts and faithlessness.

Straightaway Jesus approaches Thomas and commands him to satisfy his curiosity, to see the pierced hands and to make sure of it that they were pierced with nails by passing his finger over the print, and to thrust his hand into His side. All of this was intended for a rebuke of Thomas’ scepticism. The Lord did not approve of his stubbornness in not accepting the testimony of his fellow disciples. He, therefore, adds, *Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*

To this day the Lord rebukes those who are straying away into the barren fields of doubt and infidelity, those who are on the point of leaving His flock, because they are offended in this or in that, and things do not suit them.

Do not be unbelieving, but believing. These words are intended for all the unbelieving Thomases in the world. Your faithlessness is not only unreasonable, so that you cannot satisfy your own mind with those poor arguments produced to overthrow the Gospel truth; it is also sinful.

By your unbelief you abuse God’s chosen messengers whom He has sent forth to proclaim His divine truth, and you stamp them as liars and impostors. By your unbelief you even make God a liar and place yourself above your divine Maker, contradicting His testimonies and refusing to acknowledge His supreme authority.

But what did Thomas do after the Lord had rebuked him for his unbelief? ²⁸ *And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”* So taken with surprise was Thomas, that he did not attempt to satisfy his curiosity and to stretch forth his finger and his hand. Christ had convinced him of His resurrection, so perfectly convinced him that both with amazement and with exultant joy he exclaims, *“My Lord and my God!”*

He is completely cured of his doubts and unbelief. Happy for him that he did not miss this assembly! Happy for him that he came once more and joined the gathering of those with whom he previously had been associating! O how miserable he must have felt all along in the state of unbelief, how despondent and comfortless! And his fellow disciples were so confident, so joyful and happy.

But now his soul is filled with delight; and Jesus says to him, ***“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”***

Even now the risen Lord can and will convince the faithless who are found in the gatherings of His faithful disciples. It is true, no more does Jesus appear visibly since the day of His ascension into heaven. No more does He visibly approach these unbelieving Thomases and show them His wounds. But He approaches them invisibly in His Word.

And by His life-giving Word He changes their hearts and minds and fills them with faith, with true, persevering, and unwavering faith. Whoever will hear the Word of God and not wilfully resist within himself, while he feels the convincing power of that Word, will soon find all his doubts and uncertainties removed; and the day will dawn and the day star will arise in his heart. He will believe, though he did not see, and will be blessed.

May the Lord, then, help us all sincerely and constantly to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing we may have life through His name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Trinity 19, Matthew 9:1-9

² 2 Timothy 3:16