

SERMON – PASTOR GREG
16.04.2023

BELIEVING WITHOUT SEEING. John 20:19-31. *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* Let us pray.

It was Sunday night. On the previous Thursday night Jesus had a meal with his disciples. On the next day- Friday- he was put to death by crucifixion and then laid in a tomb. Hopes and dreams were also put to death and laid in the tomb. But then, on the Sunday morning the news came that He was no longer in the tomb and that Mary had seen him alive. And two other disciples on the road to Emmaus. Now in the midst of fear and uncertainty there was a glimmer of hope- maybe, just maybe it was not all in vain after all. But they were still afraid- if their leader- the one who had given sight to the blind and who had raised the dead could be arrested and put to death- what about them! So they were together in a room and the doors were locked. WHAT FEARS KEEP US LOCKED IN? Fear of failure? Fear of rejection? Fear of sickness? Fear of death?

In the midst of their fear Jesus came and stood among them. And he spoke. PEACE BE WITH YOU. The Hebrew word for peace is SHALOM and it means more than the absence of war- it means wellbeing in the fullest sense- bodily, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, communally and not just with each other but with all of creation and with God Himself. Isaiah had prophesied of the coming Prince of Peace (Is 9) and this promise was fulfilled in the first Christmas. How many times have I heard you say to me that if it was not for Jesus you don't know how you would have coped? Jesus promises that in the darkest of days he will be with you and for you and he will give you the faith to endure (Matthew 28:20; Romans 5:5: *Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.* 1 Cor 10:13,14: *When you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Overjoyed, amazed, astounded, incredulous, thankful- we really, really can only imagine their joy but maybe we get a taste when our football club wins the premiership, when your first child was born, when your son or daughter returned safely home from war or when you heard the news: you will not die but live. But every day we can rejoice- in the cooler mornings, the sunrise, the sunset, the abundance of food and so much more.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you". In our liturgy the pastor says these same words and you respond by saying: And also with you. And sometimes after the absolution we pass the peace of God around. And maybe you remember Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: *Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called sons of God.* Through holy Baptism we have become adopted children of God and as His Son is the Prince of peace we are to be agents of peace- strive to be a maker of peace and not a maker of anger and division.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive any his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

The Father sent His Son. The Son sent the disciples. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to us. We are sent to live such godly lives that those who do not know Jesus will be challenged by the way we love, forgive, share and live our lives. And ask us- Why? And don't overlook these words: *(Jesus) breathed on them.* Are they familiar? You might remember Genesis 2:7: *The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* And you remember from a few weeks ago the story of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones (Ch. 37) where Ezekiel breathed God's Spirit into death and life was created. In a similar way God breathed His Spirit- the Holy Spirit into Sienna this morning- giving her eternal life with Him.

And now Thomas, or as he is better known- Doubting Thomas. Isn't amazing how words of Scripture have infiltrated our language- doubting Thomas. Who was this man?

We first hear of him as being one of the Twelve: Matthew 10:3: *These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James some of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alpheus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.*

The next reference is in the story of the raising of Lazarus: John 11:16: *Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him".*

Then John 14: *Thomas said to (Jesus), "Lord, we don't know where you are going so how can we know the way?"*

And now in John 20. Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them on the Sunday night of his resurrection. He heard the news but words were not enough- he wanted to see for himself. He wanted to see Jesus with his own eyes and even put his fingers and hand into the wounded Jesus- otherwise I WILL NEVER EVER BELIEVE.

This is the challenge of God. This is the test. We live, especially in the modern west, in a world dominated by the material and physical. It is only in the last 30 or so years we have become more aware of the spiritual world. I grew up in a rationalist, material, scientific world- dominated by facts and evidence. I never worshipped in a church until I met Alicia at the age of 23. Faith was an irrelevant concept for me. I was much like Thomas: unless I could see with my own eyes or have God proved to me I could never ever believe. But God wants us to live by faith- not by sight.

One week later Jesus again came to the disciples who were still in a locked room. Despite having seen the risen Lord Jesus they were still afraid- afraid of arrest of trial and of death. Jesus came and again he said "Peace be with you".

And then to Thomas: *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.* Unlike the vast majority of the millions of men and women who have become Christian in the last two thousand years- Thomas was given physical and material proof that Jesus was alive. And his response?

My Lord and my God! But what about us? How can we believe without seeing Jesus with our own eyes? How can we trust that God is real and that He is for us and with us? Is heaven real or only a figment of our imagination?

And this is the challenge of God- He want us to live by faith:

2 Cor 4:18: *So we fix our eyes on not what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 Cor 5:7: *We live by faith and not by sight.*

Hebrews 11: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

Thomas saw and believed, we have not seen and yet we believe and in that working out of the faith given to us we are more blessed than Thomas: *Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

But what is it that we are to believe? *Jesus did many other miraculous sign in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Amen.