

The Second Sunday Of Easter

May 1, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! 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 anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs 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 God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (NIV)

Have you ever been given a nickname that has stuck with you for some time, maybe for something you did or something you said? I have. My name is Thomas and I have a nickname, and I'm not talking about the name Didymus which means "twin." I've been labeled with a nickname that has lasted not just for years but for centuries. If you are a Christian I'm guessing you too have called me by this name a time or two. Most people know me as "doubting" Thomas. This morning I am going to talk to you about what I did and what I said to earn such a nickname. But before we get to that I'd like to tell you a little about me and my life.

News had been quickly spreading about a prophet out of Nazareth. His name was Jesus. He started to call men, disciples, to follow Him. He chose me. Why? I still do not know, but I can say for certain it was by grace. I did nothing deserving of being called an apostle, but Jesus chose me and I followed Him. Jesus asking me to follow Him is by far the best thing that ever happened to me. Jesus was able to tell His disciples things about ourselves the first time we met Him. Once at a wedding He changed water right into wine. Jesus told us we would see greater things than those and boy oh boy was He right! One night Jesus calmed a dangerous storm just by saying: "**Be still!**" Another time I saw Jesus cast a whole bunch of demons right out of a man - demons that even called Jesus the Son of the Most High God! And you know what? Before long I started to believe it - that Jesus was God - that Jesus was my God!

But even more than that, I began to trust that Jesus was my Lord. I believed Jesus was the Promised One as we all confessed with Peter - ***“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** (Matthew 16) My Lord Jesus kept His promises. He was faithful, always. All you had to do was listen to Jesus teach - His Word was truth! And His love for people was unlike anything you have ever seen. He had compassion. He forgave even the worst of sinners. I was more than happy to call Jesus my Lord. That is why when everyone was trying to talk Jesus out of going into Jerusalem, but Jesus insisted to make His way to the home of Mary and Martha, I confidently spoke up: ***“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*** (John 11). But I guess my words are not as true as His. The proof was in the pudding, and I was not ready to die with Him. I admit I was pretty confused in the upper room when I asked Jesus: ***“Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*** I didn't yet completely understand the meaning of Jesus' answer when He replied: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14)

Now this brings us up to the point where I became the man you know as “*doubting*” Thomas. It was the third day since they crucified Him. I can't even begin to describe the emotion of those three days. Among us followers of Jesus there was fear, grief, guilt, confusion, depression, and yes doubt - much doubt! That third day it got even more crazy. Some of the women came back from the tomb saying Jesus' body was no longer in the grave. The stories were starting to run wild. That evening I was not with my brothers in the house, but when I returned now they were telling me the same story. They all insisted: ***“We have seen the Lord!”*** But I said, ***“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”***

Please don't look at me that way! I was not the only disciple of Jesus that had his doubts. We all did. If you'd have seen what we had seen you would've had them too! How could such terrible things happen to Jesus? If He was my Lord how could He look so lowly? If He was my God why and how would He be forsaken by God in such a way? It's hard to even talk about without getting too emotional. We saw the nails go into His hands and His feet - the dagger through His side to make sure Jesus was dead. Yes, of that I had no doubt. Jesus was dead! Unless I got proof I could see and touch, unless I saw those nail marks and touched the side of the One they crucified on that Friday I would not believe it. News that Jesus lives seemed to me way too good to ever be true.

Can any of you honestly tell me that you have never had any doubts? Haven't each of you deserved the label “*doubter*” in front of your name at one time or another? When things start to look or go bad, when you suffer, do you ever want some proof of God's care? When your sins start to get the best of you, when guilt begins to weigh you down, haven't you ever desired some forgiveness that you can see and touch? When you see a loved one die and their body placed into the ground have you ever had any doubt? I'm reckoning that I am not alone.

But for that one week I sure felt all alone. I would have to say it was probably the longest week of my life. You can just imagine some of the thoughts running through my head. Then exactly one week later, in that same house, this time, I was with my brothers. We had the doors locked. Suddenly, there Jesus was...standing right among us. It was unbelievable! I will never forget the sound of His voice as He spoke the most beautiful

words: ***"Peace be with you!"*** After all I had said and after all I had done, Jesus offers peace - to me! Jesus forgave me for my sins!

Then Jesus turns to me and says: ***"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*** It was true - it was all true! Jesus had risen just like He said. With the kind of love that I had only seen from Him, Jesus offered me the very proof for which I asked. I wanted to be sure, and now I was because Jesus made sure of it. I finally cried out words that I wanted to believe and now knew were certain: ***"My Lord and my God!"***

That, dear friends, is exactly who Jesus is - He is my Lord and my God. He is the Savior God promised to send me. His cross finally makes sense. He went to it to suffer and die for my sins, for my doubts. And with my own eyes I saw and with my own hands I felt that He had won. Death is defeated. My sins are paid - all of them. I now realized the place where I was going - heaven. Since Jesus, by His grace, chose me and made this clear to me, He was now ready to send me. Jesus sent me into the world to proclaim this message of repentance and forgiveness in His name. If you read any of the many historical records all of them will tell you that I ran with this gospel, this good news about Jesus, all the way to India. You may still know me as *"doubting"* Thomas, but my risen Savior gave me all the confidence I needed. For my God and my Lord Jesus who gave Himself for me, I was now ready to die.

So if you all want to keep referring to me as *"doubting"* Thomas, go ahead if you want. What I did and said to get this nickname has been written down in God's Word for you. It is right here you witness the great love of Jesus too. Marvel at the lengths Jesus will go to remove the doubts and calm the fears of a wavering disciple like me. And Jesus wants to do the same for you. Because I insisted on making sure, of wanting to see evidence, you too get to see beyond a doubt that Christ has risen. He has risen indeed! Please understand you can trust all Jesus' promises. Blessed are you, Jesus says, who do not see and yet believe. Go to God's Word daily for your comfort and proof that Jesus is your Savior. Receive the Holy Supper Jesus provided for you to taste and see your forgiveness. Listen to Jesus, your God and your Lord, as He says: ***"Stop doubting and believe."*** After all, that is why Jesus has given each of you His Word - ***"these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*** Amen.