



I'll See for Myself

(John 20:19-31)

Christ is RISEN! He is RISEN indeed! HALLELUJAH! Christ is RISEN! He is RISEN indeed! HALLELUJAH! Here we are, sisters and brothers, on the second Sunday of Easter. Now just for a little clarification, contrary to popular belief, Easter is not just one day. Easter is actually a season in the liturgical church year. Certainly you remember that we've just experienced forty days of Lent – ending with Holy Week. Now we enter the 50 days of Easter which is also known as “The Week of Weeks”. We get that name because a week is seven days, and there are seven Sundays in the Easter season and $7 \times 7 = 49$. And when we include Easter Sunday, ($49+1=50$) then we have the 50 days of Easter. The 50 days of Easter, aka The Week of Weeks begins with Easter Eve and ends with the commemoration of the day of Pentecost when we celebrate the birth of the Church. So, in a few weeks on June 4th (on Pentecost Sunday), we will hear again the beginning of today's Gospel, where Jesus visited the frightened disciples behind locked doors and breathes on them and tells them to “Receive the Holy Spirit.” On Pentecost Sunday, we will also hear Luke's account from the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit, like a rushing wind and tongues of fire, is poured out on disciples of all nations. John and Luke help us celebrate the Holy Spirit as the power of God among us that heals, forgives, transforms us, and unites us.

So, here we are today, on this second Sunday of Easter. Today we encounter the all too familiar story of the so-called “Doubting Thomas.” This is the story of a man on a journey of faith, a journey common to most of humanity. But this is a story of a man known by a moniker that he did not really earn. I believe that the so-called “Doubting Thomas” has received a bad rap for centuries. After all, this was the same disciple who accompanied Jesus on a perilous journey. He told the rest of the disciples, “Let's go to Bethany. And if we die, so be it. I'm not afraid of death.” Oh yes, this was the man whose confession was the Christological climax of the entire Gospel. You remember, “And Thomas said to Jesus, My Lord and my God. . . .” Now usually when this story comes up in the lectionary I don't preach about Thomas. No,

instead of looking at Thomas and his *way to faith*, I talk about Jesus, who *is* **The Way** of our faith. But this time I want to take a closer look at our brother Thomas....in a minute.

John's gospel reads, "When it was evening on that day...and the doors of the house where his disciples had met were locked for fear of the religious authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (vs 20) Ahhh, now that's some kind of savior! Here the disciples were locked away and afraid. (Even though by this time Mary had already given them the good news of the resurrection yet they still were acting in fear.) I suppose we're no different. We've heard the good news of the resurrection. In fact, Jesus mentions us in this very passage. Jesus offers the beatitude, "Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe." Sisters and brothers, that is us. And yet, at times, fear grips us and we hide. Sometimes we hide behind the locked doors of our hearts. We've been hurt too many times before and we are not letting anybody in, period. Sometimes we hide behind the locked doors of our intellect afraid to deal with our own emotions, our own pain. Or, sometimes we hide behind the locked doors of our comfort zones; after all, it's safer there. No matter...because just like with his disciples, Jesus breaks through barriers to stand with us in the midst of our fears.

What barriers does Jesus need to break through in your life?

You know, I can't help but wonder what Jesus' inner dialog must have been like. It might have gone something like this, "Hey friends, did you honestly think I would not come for you. Didn't I promise you that I would never leave you without a comforter? Look, I know you locked the doors out of fear. But, Friends, I have conquered death and the grave so a locked door for me is a piece of cake, after all I am The Door! I give you Peace!" Sisters and brothers, isn't it empowering to know that there is no obstacle that we can erect, no door that we can lock, no structure that can be built, that our Jesus cannot overcome? And just like with the disciples, Jesus overcomes barriers to bring us peace. "Peace be with you. I have conquered death." "Peace be with you. Your savior is in your midst." "Peace be with you, I am the Resurrection and the Life." I need to take a quick break here to remind you that this is why we share The Peace with each other in every Sunday service. It's more than then just getting to know the people we sit next to in church. It is more than a simple greeting or polite gesture. "Good morning, so nice to see you." No sisters and brothers it is so much more than that.

When we share the Peace of Christ with each other we are speaking a word of transformation over their lives. A word of freedom. A word power. A word of our Resurrection Promise, the very words of Jesus himself. Please keep that in mind the next time we share The Peace of Christ in this assembly. Let's get back to the story.

After Jesus gives his peace to the disciples, he goes a step further. In an act of intimacy, Jesus reveals his scars to his disciples. Jesus reveals the wounds of the resurrected Christ. (Please note that the Resurrection did not erase the wounds of Jesus). You know, some of us are wounded. Some of us have been deeply wounded and yes we have the scars to prove it. But you know what? Jesus shows us that wounds, marks, and scars, do not hinder the resurrection promise. Jesus is completely approachable, giving his disciples full access. Jesus revealed his hands and his side. This was an act of authentication. Jesus revealed his scars so that his disciples would believe that he was indeed their resurrected friend and, now, savior.

And again Jesus says, "Peace be with you" and the disciples rejoiced. This is good news. When we are afraid, Jesus seeks after us, gives us Peace, and we find Joy. Ahh, but there's more. After his disciples rejoiced, they were sent. And as part of their commissioning Jesus breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Now, sisters and brothers, I have to emphasize the fact that the so-called "Doubting Thomas" was not there. He missed these incredible events. So, when he hears of it, he tells the disciples, "I'll see for myself. Until then, I will not believe! I will not believe until I see the mark of the nails in his hands –like you did. No! I want to see for myself. And until then, I will not believe- not until I put my finger in the scars of his hands –like you did. And no, no, I will not believe not until I touch the wound in his side –just like you did. I need to see it for myself!" And what does Jesus do? What does Jesus do for the so-called Doubting Thomas? A week later (the second Sunday of Easter) Jesus returns to his disciples. Jesus returns and reveals. Jesus comes to Thomas and before Thomas can even ask, Jesus, knowing that Thomas would recognize him by his scars, shows Thomas his hands and says, "Touch me here." Then Jesus shows Thomas his side and says, "Touch me here." Come on sisters and brothers. What if we recognized Jesus Christ in each other by our scars? What if when I looked at you and you looked at me, we could see the resurrection promise sparkling just beneath the surface of our brokenness? ... Peace be with you.

“Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’” When he had said this, Jesus breathed on them and said to them “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Jesus has breathed on us and Jesus comes to us and that same Jesus is right here, right now. The God of the universe makes house calls. But you don’t have to take my word for it. See for yourself. So whether we are behind locked doors or free and fabulous. Jesus is here. See for yourself. Whether we find ourselves barricaded behind a wall of anxiety with our hearts filled with stress, Jesus is here. Come and see for yourself. Or maybe you feel trapped in a dungeon of despair behind sorrow’s locked doors? Jesus is here. Come and see for yourself. Or maybe you’re stumbling under the crushing weight of depression, forgotten in the valley. Jesus is here. Come and see for yourself. Or maybe you’ve been scorched by the unrelenting heat of grief and your bones are dry and your body is weary. Jesus is here. Come see for yourself. So be not discouraged when fear swallows up hope and doubt tramples belief, because Jesus is here. Come see for yourself.

Sisters and brothers, the gift of the Holy Spirit allowed Jesus to be present with the disciples and today that same gift of the same Holy Spirit allows Jesus to be present with us. Yes, Jesus is here. Come see for yourself. Jesus is with us and there is nothing we can do about it. Jesus is with us when we are joyful or burdened, when we are adventurous or afraid, when we are wanting and when we are satisfied, and when we are skeptical or when we believe. Through joys and sorrows, through confidence and fear, through scarcity or abundance, through unemployment or job promotion, in good credit or in bad, in marriage or divorce, in baptisms or in funerals, on the mountaintop or in the valley.... Jesus is with us! Jesus is here. Come and see for yourself! Let the church say, **AMEN!**