

Second Sunday of Easter – 2023

Acts 5:29-42

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

It's a curious thing... the older I get the less I understand people. How dreamy would it be if you had access to other people's headspace? Some folks are a closed book. Winston Churchill once described Russia as being a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. I've heard a dozen guys describe their wives that way. I'm sure that's a two-way street. When Alise and I argue it typically goes something like this: wow, the sky is a brilliant blue. Funny, I was thinking that the grass is a glorious green. Are you listening? I said the sky is blue. Why is it that you can't admit that the grass is green? If we so often can't understand our own spouse, how are we ever going to figure out Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice?

I once thought that I understood Thomas. It's a pretty forceful statement: "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). It's militant, that statement. I figured that it came from a blistered heart. Have you ever been hurt so bad that you turn angry? Thomas seems pretty angry. Seeing the One he loved, the One in whom Thomas had placed all his hope, all his trust – seeing Jesus so horribly tortured – Thomas' heart seemed, to me, to be blistered. But the Scriptures don't give us much insight into Thomas' frame of mind. Maybe Thomas had buyer's remorse. No way am I giving myself to someone like that again. I'm done with it all. My soul has been robbed. I trusted Him and what did *that* get me? Thomas was, to be sure, a stout disciple. Thomas was not a "fair weather" believer. When danger was near, Thomas said to the others: "Let's us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16).

I suspect that you have seen your fair share of people who have turned away from the faith. People struggle. Life is hard. The world's temptations are always in overdrive. The media is a satanic cesspool of rancid unbelief. Our hearts grow bored; we are fickle and prideful and ungrateful and lazy and easily distracted. One of our biggest problems is that we want to be liked... by the unbelieving world. Some people begin to think that Christianity is too much to live up to. Some people discover that they can't control the pastor and so they leave. One of the reasons that some folks stay away from church is because, they say, that it's filled with sinners. A-yep; and hypocrites and those who don't practice what they preach; check, check, and check. Sometimes terrible things happen to faithful people and blame, mingled with anger over their misfortune, is put at God's feet. Thomas had seen the One he loved brutally executed. In Him was life and the forces of evil robbed Thomas' Rabbi of life. In Thomas' mind, it had all fallen apart. What's the most important part of that last phrase? In Thomas' *mind*.

Jesus had been busy on Easter. He was with the women at the tomb early in the morning. Later, He walked with Cleopas and Cleopas' unnamed friend from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus also appeared to the disciples. The Lord had sending on His mind. The Lord had the Office of the Holy Ministry on His mind. The Lord had the blessing of His church on His mind. Into that room, a room rank with fear, the resurrected Lord came and stood and brought the bounty of Easter. "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). It wasn't a polite wish or a chipper greeting – it was a NT proclamation of eternal victory, it was a declarative statement on the status of the

relationship between God and man. His wounds; Christ's words are mirrored by His wounds. The proof of peace was His hands and side.

I suspect that when you see the Lord Christ with your own eyes, He will say exactly those words to you. His countenance, His glory will fill your being and He will declare to you the product of His death and resurrection. With a personal intimacy that is just for you, Jesus will proclaim His triumph and it will wash over you like the river of the water of life: "Peace be with you." Joy! That's what the disciples felt. Joy; it swamped their fear. Christ breathed on them (John 20:22). "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Forgive sins, for I am sending you with my authority. My triumph is to be unleashed in your preaching, in your absolution, in the Word of Truth that will invade the hearts of the broken. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:23). How long has that reality endured? 2000 years; an unbroken line of grace is traced back to that moment. Christ's church is alive with Christ's Spirit. Christ's church is alive with Christ's Word, Christ's blood, Christ's triumph.

This church is of God. No man has built this church – the One, Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church; your church. The Gospel is spoken here. That message applies to everyone. It applies to everyone universally and it applies to everyone uniquely. It is not my job to get into your headspace. It is my job to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2). The Word of Christ is what organizes a believer's headspace. "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18 – NIV). That is what organizes a believer's headspace. "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Jesus said that about you. You are the sinner and He has given you repentance, the gift of an enlightened heart, a changed heart. This bit from Romans organizes your headspace: "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). God's Word organizes His church. God's Word organizes this congregation and every other like it.

Thomas wasn't there. He disbelieved the Gospel which his brothers had spoken to him; I don't know why. Jesus was aware. Remember, it was only in Thomas' mind that it had all fallen apart. Christ came to him to show him that absolutely nothing had fallen apart. "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe" (John 20:27). From Thomas' mouth then streamed the faith that animates your heart: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). The most glorious confession in the whole Gospel of John comes from Thomas: My Lord and my God! That confession animates this room, it animates Christ's church in every age, and it animates your soul. Jesus blessed you when He said this to Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

I suspect that you are like me; especially you older folks. People mystify you. Folks aren't stable. Some people's attitude about Christ and His church fluctuate without a reason that you can discern. You are puzzled, alarmed and you want both to make sense of it and address it in a reasonable way, a persuasive way. I suggest an alternate route. Simply speak the Gospel to

them. Don't try to figure people out; proclaim the good news to them and let that organize their mind. The disciples did it with Thomas and he refused it. Okay; Jesus came and organized Thomas' faith by showing Him the truth. His Words and His Wounds were persuasive. People can be inscrutable. That's not going to change. Don't get in a twist when other people are beyond your ken. I realize, what I just said is easy to say and hard to do. This bit from Romans is supposed to help: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). St. John said the same thing this way: "Now Jesus did many other things that are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). God loves weird people. God loves unstable people. God loves broken people. He wants them to hear the Gospel. It's a joy to hear it. It is a joy to speak it. The Gospel organizes us all.