

## **"THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT"**

*A Sermon delivered at St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Virginia*

*On April 2/3, 2016, the Sunday after Easter (Easter 2)*

*By the Rev. Dr. B. F. Nass, Pastor Emeritus*

*On Gospel Text: John 20:19-31*

Dear Resurrection People – Members of St. John's, welcome and honored guests, and especially any who still have doubts about the resurrection:

Well, who can you trust these days? Advertisers? Politicians? The media? The economy? I loved it when one of the local TV stations aired the segment, "But...does it really do that?" Invariably the product advertised failed to live up to its promised claims. What about politicians? We certainly are hearing a lot of them lately with lofty claims and promises? But we already know that many of their claims are inflated and their promises, while registering with some voters' wishes, will never become reality? The "Angie's List" of who or what you can trust keeps getting shorter. It reminds me of an old popular cartoon of a Charlie Brown type character peeking around the corner to an empty street and the caption states: "Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean that they're not out to get you." That cartoon pops into my mind when I hear the opening words of today's Gospel lesson where trust had seemingly been crushed in the blender of events and converted into slushy mixture of fear and doubt.

The closing words of St. Mark's Easter Gospel -- "They were terrified." -- is certainly carried over in today's text from John's Gospel with those most closely associated with Jesus. Behind locked doors, filled with confusion and fear, the first disciples were understandably distrustful -- distrustful of their own Rabbi Master for whom they had left everything to follow and whom they believed now to be dead, distrustful of the Jewish authorities who were surely out to get them to suffer a similar fate as their Rabbi, distrustful of each other since one of their own proved to be a traitor. Suspicion, doubt, and fear hung like a gaseous vapor in that upper room of silence and whispers -- that room which may even have been the very setting for their last meal with their Master. So many memories, so many dreams, so many hopes all now smashed to smithereens

Then some X-File type events begin to transpire. The now resurrected Jesus slips through both the locked doors of the room and the closed minds of the disciples. He cheerfully greets their sullen and suspicious stares with the casual, familiar Aramaic greeting -- "Shalom al lechem" (Peace to you) -- then proceeds to answer their questions and shows them the scars of his execution -- his hands, his feet, his side -- so there could be no doubt about it. "Hey guys, it's really me!" As that reality begins to sink in, the fists of fear open into arms of welcome and pangs of doubt are transformed into positive certainty. Relief and joy explode within and among them and spew over into a sharing of that peace, that shalom, with one another. The impossible had actually happened so that now each disciple can assuredly declare: "There's no doubt about it." All, that is, save one.

Thomas, who is not there at the time, shows up later and exhibits a behavior which earned him the title of "doubting Thomas." To the enthusiastic news of his fellow disciples, he says, "No way!" "Not good enough for me!" "I need empirical, incontrovertible proof."

Well, doesn't that sound familiar? Thomas would fit right in with the attitude of much of today's world, not just with agnostics and avowed atheists, but with the common core of much of

today's enlightened society. Many are not hesitant to express a lot of doubt about the resurrection of Jesus. "What proof do you have?" "Unless I see it, touch it, taste it, smell it, and hear it, for me it never happened.

Let's be honest. We all have our good days, but also days when we are not so sure. People, events and experiences in life can leave cruel scars, piercing wounds, and deep resentments that can turn us into a doubting Thomas. Sometimes just a single word, a picture, a person, or a story can trigger doubts that drive us into our upper room where we can hide behind the locked door of our frustration and misery. A woman who lost her husband in a helicopter crash tells of how six months later she walked into a department store and saw a man's suit on a manikin that looked just like one her husband wore. "I ran out of the store," she said, "went home and cried for two days." The real test comes when we are standing before the lifeless remains of a loved one whose leaving has taken the joy out of life and put despair into our soul, or when we watch all we have worked for taken away or destroyed by fire or flood, or when the promotion we so much hoped for goes to someone less deserving.

It is at such times that our faith must allow the risen Christ to slip through the locked door of our psyche's defenses. He greets us with resurrection words of peace and then shows us his scars – the scars of empathy with our pain, the scars of triumph over our doubt, the scars that allow us to touch him and be touched by God's gifts of grace and peace.

In the most tangible way Jesus obliges Thomas. Eight days later he reappears and singles out Thomas: "Hey Thomas, Come here. Look! Touch! Believe!" Then "doubting Thomas" is transformed into "believing Thomas." His response goes way beyond the pale of doubt destroyed to faith convinced: I now know and believe who you really are. *"My Lord and my God."*

Wouldn't it be wonderful if what happened to Thomas would also happen to us? That Jesus would appear in bodily form and tap us on the shoulder with his nail-pierced hand? Jesus must have known in advance that drift in our thought pattern because to Thomas and all of us Thomas's he adds: *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Certainly, he comes to us. We may not recognize him right away in our doubt and despair. He comes to us in the words of Holy Scripture the same way he came to his early disciples. Our text ends this way: *"These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God – so there's no doubt about it – and that believing, you may have life in his name.* He comes to us in his visible presence of bread and wine in the meal he shares with us. He comes in the form of an answer to prayer. He may come in the form of a faith-filled co-worker with a sympathetic ear. He may come in the form of a counselor or Pastor. But when he comes, (and come he does) then it's Easter all over again. There's no doubt about it.

May that risen Christ find his way into your upper room to give you the peace of knowing that he is the risen Christ, the Son of the living God and that through believing, not doubting, you may find and have life, abundant life, in his name. Amen.