

These Are Written...

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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April 23-24, 2022

John 20:19-22, 24-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were 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 his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

*Thomas had a personal encounter with Jesus which led to a confession of Jesus being God. The other disciples didn't exclude him for his doubt. We stand on the shoulders of all the others who have come before to make that exact confession, even when faith is confusing, challenging, freeing or joyful. This is the work of God...to help us believe.*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed, alleluia!

A friend of mine has faithful expressions all over her house. They are single words on coasters or on the wall or taped to her mirror. Hope! Keep the faith! Grace. Believe! I asked her about them and she said, "It isn't easy to always have hope or

believe. I hang them up, to encourage me in my faith walk, so I can keep believing.”

How true it is. It is easy to believe on an Easter Sunday like we had last weekend. Chairs are filled with members and guests. The music is grand, flowers and decorations remind us something is particularly special about the day. There is joy in the air and our Lord is near.

Oh, the Lord is near today as well, and we take delight in seeing our friends and receiving the sacrament. And...some of us might have experienced a tough week. Images of the war come directly into our living rooms and we again ask the questions, ‘when will it end, God?’

Thankfully, we are no different than the band of disciples who were locked in a room the day Christ rose from the dead. These are the ones who had abandoned Him. One denied knowing Him. Others watched Jesus die from a distance. They’ve seen the open tomb. They are confused. They wonder. Emotions abound. But fear is everywhere.

Then the Lord emerges right into the room. The disciples rejoice at His presence. We can hardly imagine seeing Jesus after He died on the cross. Yet Thomas wasn’t there. Thus, he asks for what everyone else got to see.

‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’ None of the disciples scold him for it and neither will we. In fact, neither does Jesus.

When Jesus appears again one week later, He gives Thomas exactly what he needs to believe. ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’

Then comes Thomas’ confession of “my Lord and my God”. My Savior and God. For all of us who are in awe of what God did in and through Jesus the Messiah, we too as a community and as individuals, bow down to worship in humble admiration.

With strains of “Jesus Christ is Risen Today” still ringing in our collective memory, we are amazed at God’s miracle of life in this risen one. We manage to speak our own reverence at Jesus’ feet. That’s what happens when God changes

our hearts and minds; we cannot help but say it right along with Thomas. Our Lord! Our God!

John's Gospel is full of people who have these one-on-one encounters with Jesus. Nicodemus. Nathaniel. Pilate. The man born blind. Mary. Martha. Peter. Some believe in Jesus, some are confused. Some don't know what to think. Remember His conversation with Martha? "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?" To all of them, in one way or another, Jesus says, "Do you believe that I am He? That I am God?"

Believing in Jesus, or continuing to believe in Jesus is the main thrust of John's Gospel. Yet the believing, the trusting, the faith... is connected with a living God, the real-life Jesus Christ.

Thomas shouldn't be known as the doubter, but the believer. There is nothing wrong with seeing and trusting the truth of what is seen. Jesus gave Thomas everything he needed to believe.

Thomas was a believer. Tradition has it Thomas travelled outside the Roman empire to southern India. There he lived in a cave and brought the Gospel to the people. For Christians, Thomas is the patron saint of India. He established seven churches, baptizing families, performing miracles, and ordaining teachers.

In the courtyard of a church in India is a statue of Thomas touching the wounds of the resurrected Christ. Over the church door, in red letters are the words, "My Lord and My God."

One of my seminary professors was from India. He was born a Muslim, practicing Islam. Upon hearing the message of Christianity as an adult, he thought the story so fantastical to believe, it simply had to be true. God worked in his life, and revealed that Jesus was the only way, the truth. He went on to write several books and influence students for many years.

We, you and I, stand on the shoulders of all the people who have come to make that same confession as Thomas. Think of all the believers in the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Corinth. The Gospel travelled to Rome, Britain and sub-Saharan Africa. Across centuries and continents, Jesus' story passed from generation to generation down to our great-great-grandparents and finally to us.

When Thomas confesses Jesus as Lord, he does so, not only for himself, but for all of us who follow. Whether we are sound in our convictions, trusting God fully, or are confused and scared, wondering what God is up to in this mixed-up world. This is why, St. John writes, “But these (stories) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

What are the stories you carry? Who has confessed Christ to you, so that God began to work in your life? There was a man in my first congregation who walked to Sunday school each week all by himself starting at the age of five. His parents never attended, but the people at the church made him feel welcome. So he went and he never took church for granted.

Then there is Pr Paul Gebo in Durango, Colorado. His home congregation, Christ the King Lutheran, has embraced Pr Paul’s new ministry among the homeless of Durango. They live in Purple Cliffs above delRio de las Animas; the River of the Lost Souls. He gets to talk to people who have been wounded by church and offer them the unconditional love of Jesus. Pr Paul isn’t St. Thomas, but he could be. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2022/04/setting-up-church-at-a-homeless-encampment/>)

We all have those people in our lives on whose shoulders we walk. Those we trust, who trusted and believed God before us. Who are the St. Thomas’ for you?

(Spend a moment sharing stories.)

This is God’s work...to help us believe. For we are those who walk without seeing, and yet trust in the truth of our Lord and God. Amen.