**John 20:24-31** April 1, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter Sunday

*John 20:24Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So 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.”*

*26A 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!” 27Then 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.” 28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” 30Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But 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. [Sermon Text]*

Dear Friends in Christ,

So you heard it four different times, four different ways, from three different authors. Jesus has risen! They saw him. They were witnesses.

But what does it mean?

Is it a nice story, kind of like stories of a certain guy who likes wearing silly red and white winter wear and distinguishable by a belly that shakes like a bowlful of jelly. Is the original Easter story one of those nice stories with a happy ending that we tell young ones to make the world a little less scary than it really is?

If that’s all it is, then the Easter story is just a cop out.

Is the Easter story a nice story where you can kind of lazily pick and choose the details you like, and imagine that death really isn’t all that bad? That everyone gets to go to heaven? Well, that is what precisely zero of the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection tell us.

What is the Easter story about?

If it isn’t a fairy tale to help us sugar-coat the cold hard realities of life, if it isn’t a blanket assurance that we will all get to go to happy hunting grounds in the sky, then what is the Easter story all about?

Let’s ask Thomas.

Thomas had a bunch of friends who told him something he was quite sure couldn’t happen. Some of these friends had put Jesus’ cold, stiffening corpse in the grave. Yet a few days later these same friends claimed that they had seen Jesus very much alive. Even though different people claimed to have witnessed him at different times and different places, Thomas simply could not accept it. It wasn’t possible.

Now this can happen to anyone. What did you think the first time you heard about the 9/11 attacks? What did you think the first time you heard about the space shuttle *Challenger* exploding? When really bad—or really good—things happen, we often have a moment of disbelief. For a moment we are unable to believe, unable to process what it all means.

But’s that not what it was with Thomas. A week later he was still in denial. It really was arrogance. He refused to believe multiple witnesses of multiple events. He refused to believe witnesses whom he knew and trusted, at least a little bit. He was certain of his own superiority. He would not be duped like the rest. Something must have happened to deceive his weak-willed friends. Maybe they just couldn’t cope with the grief. But he wouldn’t fall for it.

He refused in strong, almost vulgar, language, “Ok you guys, how plain can I make this? If I can’t put my fingers into the nail holes in his hands, if I can’t put my hand into his side, I *will not* believe it.”

Jesus had his reasons, but Jesus took his time returning Thomas’ call. He waited another full week before showing Thomas a measure of grace that few ever get. Jesus appeared and, well…

Have you ever been talking about your boss in the not most complimentary way in the break room. You figure you are in a safe zone. You have never, ever seen your boss in the breakroom. Your break is over, you walk out, and standing right there in the hall is your boss? You freeze, and then you think you should have tried to not look guilty and just walked on, and then you walk and think “I should have apologized”, and your boss just lets you go. For weeks that split second realization haunts you.

Kind of what Jesus did with Thomas. Not only does he talk directly to Thomas. He uses Thomas’ own words, his own vocabulary against him, ***“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.”*** Jesus had heard the entire conversation, and he lets Thomas know it.

He isn’t going to let Thomas off easy. Jesus isn’t being mean-spirited. He is confronting sin. Sin cannot be given any space, any corner to hide. Jesus must not only show him the truth, but also show him that his doubt was an insult. Parents, coaches, teachers, doctors, counselors, psychiatrists, anybody and everybody who is in a “people” profession know that there are times for tough love. There are times to be merciful and times to call out sin.

And so Jesus, who had predicted his own resurrection, looked Thomas in the eye and challenged him, “Do you want to call me a liar? Do you want to call your brothers a liar? ***Stop doubting and believe.”***

By God’s grace Thomas cries out, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** We aren’t told any more. Did he get down on his knees in repentance? Did he apologize to the other disciples? Did he promise to never be so stupid again? We aren’t told. But he did believe.

That is what Jesus was after, faith. In fact, that is the whole point of the resurrection. Jesus had died and cried, *“It is finished.”* The sacrifice for sin was complete. But Jesus rose from the dead so that not only was the payment made, but the papers were notarized and publicized by God himself. “Yes, all sin is paid for!” Easter is God’s oath that everything that Jesus Christ said, all that is promised in this word of truth, is true.

That’s why Jesus told Thomas, ***“Stop doubting and believe.”*** That is why Jesus says about you and me, ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** That is why the Holy Spirit led John the Evangelist to close with these words: ***“These [words] 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.”*** It is about faith in the Savior, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Bread from Heaven, the Lamb of God, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Ransom for our souls. Easter is God’s seal on all that His Word says about Jesus. Amen!