

We Have Seen the Lord
2nd Sunday of Easter - April 11, 2010
John 20:19-31; Revelation 1:4-8

Easter Evening found ten of Jesus' followers huddled in the same room where, a few days before, all twelve had sat at table with Jesus. What a difference a few days make. Judas was dead by his own hand. If John was the Beloved Disciple, he came closest to faithfulness at the Cross; but here he was, making sure the door was locked lest they be arrested by the Jewish leaders. Peter, to his shame, had denied Jesus three times; the others had fled. No one could believe the story the women had told about meeting Jesus early that morning.

And Thomas wasn't even present. Was his grief so great that he couldn't bear to be around the others? Was he so ashamed of his own faithlessness - and theirs - that he couldn't look them in the eye? Was he so terrified that he didn't want to be seen on the street lest he be identified as one of Jesus' followers? Was his faith so shaken that he wrestled with the temptation to curse God and die?

We don't know - but we can guess. Most of us have endured a great loss; been overwhelmed with grief; or struggled with shame, doubt, or despair. Especially at first, we don't want to be around other people. When the heart is rubbed raw, we want to turn the phone off, crawl in bed, and pretend it never happened.

But the disciples were pilgrims in Jerusalem; they had nowhere else to go. It can't have been a cheery gathering. Even if Jesus *had* been raised, he hadn't appeared to *them* but only to a few women. Perhaps he was so angry with them that there was no forgiveness or future for them in his company. How much better than Judas *were* they? How could God forgive *their* betrayal, even if it hadn't been as public? They had failed Jesus utterly as disciples. Was it any wonder that they hadn't seen Jesus? How could they look *him* in the eye?

And then suddenly, Jesus *was* there. Aside from the terror any sane person would feel if a formerly dead person should suddenly "beam down" and stand there big as life, can you imagine the guilty apprehension the disciples felt? All their failures, doubts, and fears seemed doubly obvious and doubly awful. Were they about to have a "Come to Jesus" talk - with Jesus himself?

Peace be with you. With a word, Jesus changed everything. He came not to condemn his fallible, sinful followers, but to save them. He showed them his hands and his side: here were the scars of those deadly wounds that had sealed his promise of forgiveness and salvation; and here *he* was, gloriously alive, to deliver on that promise.

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, filling them with the same power and authority his Father had given him to forgive and retain sins.

In two sentences, Jesus announced *their* forgiveness, their commissioning as apostles, and their mission. In two gestures - pointing to the tokens of his death, and breathing the Spirit of Life upon them - he restored their faith and gave them an invincible authority as they continued his mission on earth. *They, as forgiven sinners sent out by Jesus, had the sole mission of announcing that, for anyone who would accept it, forgiveness of sins and salvation had been accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

That mission first led them to one who had separated himself from them: Thomas. Whatever words were spoken, only five mattered: *We have seen the Lord.* The only reason Thomas was in the upper room the following Sunday was because the others sought him out. They had no word of condemnation, no guilt trip, no recriminations, not even an explanation. But what they said was enough: *We have seen the Lord.*

Philip, newly-minted as a disciple, had found Nathaniel early in Jesus' ministry. Philip was a tad wordy: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph." But to Nathaniel's scoffing rejoinder, "Can anything

good come out of Nazareth," Philip answered simply: "Come and see." And when Jesus spoke directly to his disbelief, Nathaniel said, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

So now, the newly-commissioned apostles seek out Thomas: "We have seen the Lord." To his curt dismissal of their testimony - "Unless I touch his wounded flesh, I will not believe" - surely Philip or one of the others said simply, "Come and see." *And like Nathaniel before him, Thomas came - and saw.* When Jesus spoke directly to *his* disbelief, Thomas replied with the deep confession: "My Lord and my God!"

What was Jesus' mission? To save us from our sins. When our sins separate us from one another, he stands in our midst to bestow his peace. When our sins wound our souls and destroy our bodies, he brings healing. Because sin lead to death, he undergoes death in order to find us. Because sin separate us from God and send us into the clutches of the evil one, he becomes sin who knew no sin; he dies Godforsaken on a cross; he descends into hell in order to make good on the magnificent promise that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is our mission? Our name gives it away: we are Christians, little Christs. We are to go to our sisters and brothers and announce and share with them Christ's work: the forgiveness of their sins. When

shame, doubt and despair separate our neighbor from us, we are to go to them with the simple words: "We have seen the Lord. Come and see also." When sin wounds their souls and destroy their bodies, we are to bring the healing balm of the Good Physician to any who will receive it.

When their sins inevitably lead to death, we can't actually die "for them," in their place; but we are to hold before them the Cross of their Savior, who *did* die in their place and who promises that *he*, not death, has final say over them. When sin, fear, doubt, grief and despair send them spinning away from God and deeper into the grasp of the evil one, we can't go into hell for them. But we can, with the assurance, power, authority, promise and finality of heaven itself, proclaim the strong saving love and forgiveness of the One who *did* endure hell so that they won't have to. We, as forgiven sinners sent out by Jesus, have *our* sole mission: announcing the forgiveness of sins and salvation granted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we're to announce and share it with *everyone*: everyone who has screwed up; everyone who has estranged themselves from God and others; everyone who wrestles with doubt; everyone who believes that nobody, especially God, could forgive them because they can't forgive themselves; everyone who knows they've let down their nearest and dearest; anyone who might, with the last scrap of faith they possess, dare to listen.

We are to tell them: We have seen the Lord! Come with us and see; Come; hear the good news proclaimed week by week. Come; taste and see how gracious the Lord is. Come; have his flesh pressed into your wounded hand with the precious words, "This is my body, given *for you. For you!*" Do not be faithless, but believing.

You know someone like Thomas; someone who isn't here; someone who needs this fellowship and this Savior. Go to that person. Find him or her. Don't argue; don't explain; don't lay a guilt trip. Just tell them: "My dearest sister; my beloved brother, take heart. We have seen the Lord. Come; come and see. Come and hear. Come and taste, and touch; and believe. His peace, his forgiveness, his salvation, his Spirit, and his mission are *for you*. Do not sit in darkness; come, that he may fill you with his glorious light."

That's the mission the risen Savior has given to all those forgiven sinners whom he delights in calling his followers and his friends. Who knows? One of us might lead someone into the presence of Jesus; and in his gracious and forgiving presence, that person, like Thomas, might then proclaim for the whole world to hear: "My Lord and my God!"