

Text: John 20:19-31

Theme: Unless I....

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, as well as those watching online, the text for our meditation this morning is the Holy Gospel according to St. John the twentieth chapter, verses nineteen through thirty-one.

Boys and Girls how are you doing today? Good? Excellent! Does anyone want to guess what I have in this bag? What if I told you it was a stuffed animal? How could you tell? You could touch the sack and squeeze it. You could open the sack and look inside, but for now I'll keep the sack closed while we talk about our Bible lesson! Today we hear about Thomas who wants proof of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He heard the other disciple say that they had seen Jesus alive. Thomas wanted to see and feel for himself that Jesus was alive. Are we likewise? How do we deal with our own doubts and live by faith? Ponder these questions as we listen to the rest of the sermon. But first, let's look and see do I have a stuffed toy in this bag? Let's open it and see! It's true! And what else is true? Jesus our Savior is alive! He has risen from the dead!

Well, today is annual pick on Thomas day ... Good old Doubting Thomas. He missed church just one time and picked up a nick name that will follow him around until the Lord returns. It's really not fair.

It's not fair because all the other disciples doubted just as much as he did. In fact, last week's Gospel told us about the disciples' reaction when the women came and told them about the empty tomb and the angels. It said, "The women ... told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." You see, if Thomas is Doubting Thomas, then Peter is Doubting Peter, James is Doubting James, John is Doubting John, and so on. Every one of the disciples doubted, but we like to pick on poor Thomas. It would be more accurate to call the whole group the Doubting Disciples. In fact, it would be even more accurate to call them the unbelieving disciples.

We also like to pick on Thomas because he missed divine Service that first Easter. That's not really fair either. He didn't know Jesus was going to show up. Maybe he or a member of his family was sick. The Bible doesn't tell us why he was late ... why he missed Jesus. All the Bible tells us is that Thomas was not there. The Bible doesn't condemn Thomas any more than it condemns the other disciples. It really isn't fair to pick on Thomas.

Yet, we do like to pick on poor Thomas because of his great unless I statement. Hearing that Jesus is risen from the dead, Thomas responds with this statement that "Unless I put my fingers in the nail holes in His hands and put my finger in His side, I will never believe." Thomas responds with doubt and desiring facts and proof.

This should not surprise us because how often do we respond the same way. Hearing something that seems too good to be true, we want proof. A bank that misses a zero and puts a house up for sale for two thousand (2000) rather than twenty thousand (20,000). Finding one hundred dollars on the ground with no one around it. Finding that you won an all-expenses paid vacation to the Bahamas for not doing anything. Finding one million dollars in your bank account over night. How many of us would be skeptical? I am sure that many of us would

be. It just seems too good to be true. How much more so hearing that Someone, near and dear to your heart, rose from the dead and is alive again? It seems too good to be true so Thomas wants more proof.

In grace and mercy, he receives it. The next week, the disciples are once again behind locked doors. Jesus once again stands in their midst and says, "Peace be with you." He then tells Thomas Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." We do not know if Thomas actually did, but we do know his response, "My Lord and my God!" He goes from wanting proof to this great confession of faith, calling Jesus both his Lord and his God. Jesus meets Thomas' doubts with the clear reality that He, who was crucified for Thomas, and us, is indeed alive.

Jesus responds to our own doubts and desires in the same way. He comes to us, alas not in the same way as Thomas, but Jesus does come to us and gives us His peace, strengthens our faith, and calms all of our doubts and fears. He comes to us in the waters of Holy Baptism, granting us the faith to believe in Him, that we who may not see, can believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing, we may have life in His name." He comes to us through His Holy Spirit in His Word. That every time we read the Holy Scriptures, our faith grows and is strengthen more and more. He comes to us in the blessed bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, giving us His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

Thanks be to God that He does have grace and mercy upon us, that He does not leave us in our unbelief and doubt, but gives us the proof of His word, grace, and mercy that Jesus is not dead but...

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