

Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31

"My Lord and My God"

I want to repeat Jesus' own words from today's Holy Gospel. *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:29) It is all about faith! Today we find the Apostles once again hiding from the Temple leadership, in the Upper Room, out of fear. These are really not the same Apostles who followed Jesus around for three years, and they are most certainly not who they would become on the glorious Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would embolden and empower them beyond even their wildest dreams. The Gospel tells us that the doors to the Upper Room were shut *"for fear of the Jews."* They are locked! The Apostles, who had run the other way from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was arrested, were still in hiding, and they were terrified, in spite of the fact that they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. It would not be until the Holy Spirit was given to them they would boldly begin to profess their faith, - no matter what the situation or the threats that would be facing them.

All over the world today there are Christians who are gathering to worship the Risen Jesus, just as we are doing this morning, and studying the living Word of God, along with other believers. Sadly, some have to gather in secret, hiding because it is unsafe or even illegal to be a Christian where they live. People like you and me are being jailed, tortured, beheaded, and far worse – simply because they love and believe in Jesus Christ. We all need to be intentionally praying for the Persecuted Christians around the world, and in this country, praying for them and to celebrate the courage and strength that the Lord Jesus has given them throughout their ordeal.

Today's Gospel reading takes place only two weeks since the Crucifixion of Jesus. Those who were persecuted were sure of their faith in Jesus, or they would not be willing to stand up for Him. The Apostles were overjoyed that they had seen the Risen Lord – but not so much that they were going to be leaving the protection of that Upper Room. That was their stronghold, their safety net. Thomas was jealous that he was not there the week before when Jesus visited the others. Can you just imagine what that might have been like? Because Thomas asked for absolute proof - he was labeled as doubting Thomas.

"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." Last week, on Easter Sunday, I spoke to the youngsters in a special sermon about "peace" or better said – shalom. The disciples apparently did not receive Shalom, or peace from Jesus' initial greeting, because they did not rejoice until after He proved who He was. It could have been because the door was locked, and Jesus' suddenly appeared inside. They might have been stunned and afraid, - until Jesus showed them His wounds. When they recognized Him in that "locked" upper room, their joy became so great it just could not be contained. They had received the joy that Jesus had promised them in John 16:22. He told them when He was speaking of His impending death: *"I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*

Jesus commissioned these Apostles – and

- They received their call to ministry: – Jesus said “*Peace (shalom) be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*”
- They received the power to forgive sins: - Jesus told them “*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” Members of the Sanhedrin who followed Jesus, complained when Jesus forgave sins – saying that no one but God can forgive sins. Well hello! Jesus can forgive sins, and so can the ones that He gives the power to. Jesus gave that power to the Apostles, and so also to the priests who come after.

Not only had the disciples seen Jesus, received their call to ministry, and the power to forgive sins – but they also received new life in the Holy Spirit – as Jesus breathed upon them. I have said many, many times that the word for breath is ruach, the word for Spirit in Hebrew is ruach. They must have been incredibly ecstatic, *but one of them was not there! And that was Thomas.*

Thomas comes back, through that locked door and is met at the door by his brothers with: “*We have seen the Lord!*” They go on: “He was here, and He gave us the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins.” Can you just imagine Thomas missing out on that?

The following week: Jesus came back to that same locked room and said, “*Peace Be with you!*” “*Shalom!*” And Thomas is there this time, and Jesus goes right to Thomas and directly addresses him: “*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*” Thomas does not even have to touch Jesus. And his reaction is like no one else’s reaction in all of Holy Scripture filled with wonder, awe, humility and amazement - He says: “*My Lord and My God!*” We are blessed to get this eyewitness account from John of what took place in that Upper Room. Thomas proclaims Jesus as “*My Lord and My God!*”

Jesus then speaks of other believers and their faith: “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*” Jesus is talking to each one of us - *Blessed are we!* Blessed are we who believe, even though we have not seen! Jesus knows all those who come to faith in His Name.

None of us have had the opportunity to see Jesus when He walked the earth 2000 years ago, and yet here Our Lord Jesus calls us blessed! We believe in the One who died for us! We have faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ, whose Resurrection we celebrated just last Sunday – Easter Sunday – and we celebrate every Sunday! We believe that we will one day share in the joy of His Resurrection when we meet Jesus face to face. “*My Lord and my God!*”

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When we read and meditate on the complete story of God's hand in the salvation history of humanity, found in all of God's Written Word – the Holy Scriptures - we can be in His presence. When we worship, and come together with other believers, just as we are doing today, we can see Him, knowing that when we repent - that we are truly forgiven – because of Jesus' dying in our place. We can see Him when we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus "feeding in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving" in the Holy Eucharist, in complete and total freedom. We can show Him to others by sharing with others who Jesus Christ is in your life. You do not have to have a big Bible in your hand, standing on a street corner, screaming Jesus is coming – the end is near! All you have to do is tell them who Jesus is in your life, and how He has transformed you into the person that they see today.

I want you to hear the words of another eyewitness, that was present each of those days. His name is the Apostle Peter who wrote in his first letter, chapter 1 verses 8 and 9: "*though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*" You see today's Gospel message is about believing in the Resurrected Jesus and sharing His love with others. John reminds us in his words given at the end of today's Gospel message: "*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.*" My Lord and My God - amen and Alleluia!