

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31

"The Eyes of An Apostle "

Can you just imagine what it must have been like in the life of just one of the Apostles; to see things through the eyes of an apostle? Just two weeks ago you marched into Jerusalem alongside Jesus – as He triumphantly rode the foal of a donkey into the city – people chanting “*hosanna, hosanna in the highest*” “*blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord*” and waving palm branches; and then just days before that you witnessed Jesus calling His friend Lazarus out of the tomb. (John 11) The Passover is coming quickly and you are helping to make preparations for the Seder meal in the Upper Room. When the evening of the meal comes - Jesus is busy washing your feet, as uncomfortable as that may be, to have your Master acting like a servant over you!

Something amazing happens during that meal – Jesus says an awesome prayer to the Father of blessing and sanctifying everyone who believes in Him – and asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to stand by and protect His “friends.” You are no longer “servants” – but “friends.” So much was happening during the meal – Jesus gave His Body and His Blood – (that apostle is still trying to figure that one out) and then Judas ups and leaves! They all leave and go from the city across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives – and into the quiet of the Garden of Gethsemane – for Jesus to pray. The Apostles all fall asleep – twice – and then Judas comes with a mob of soldiers. He kisses Jesus – and Peter becomes enraged drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant (John 18:10) and Jesus puts the ear back on. They drag Jesus off, bound like He is some criminal! All of the Apostles fled – but Peter followed at a distance to see where they were taking Jesus.

Most of the Apostles were hiding for fear of the Jews catching them and killing them too. They get word that Peter denied Jesus three times – just as Jesus had warned him earlier in the evening. The rest of the time those in the upper room rely on people coming to tell them what is happening. John is with Jesus’ mother Mary and Mary Magdalene – and they witness the crucifixion – and tell the others about Jesus’ death – and that He is now buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s new tomb – a brand new tomb – for the Savior. Can you just imagine the feelings that were going on in that upper room? Feelings of fear and depressing sadness. They had spent three years following their Master and now He is gone! What now?

They have plenty of time to reflect on Jesus’ words saying that He must die – but He will come back. He told them (John 10:14-15) “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep.*” (John 10:18) “*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*” There was Jesus as “*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*” (Mark 8:31) Can you imagine how they missed it while it was being said? They weren’t putting two and two together. But right now these are

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only words to the Apostles – for they are all alone and deathly afraid! They must have been clinging to Jesus' words *"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life."* (Matthew 17:22-23)

Can you just imagine all of these scenes re-running through their minds? And then there were Jesus' words to them in that upper room – that His time was coming soon: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."* Thomas said to him, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* (John 14:1-7) But in spite of these words of direction and comfort - they were still alone and afraid.

And then something incredible happens – early on the Sunday after Jesus' crucifixion – Mary Magdalene, Peter and John come into the room and tell everyone that Jesus' grave is empty – and Mary Magdalene says she has seen and really spoken with Jesus. But how can this be true? Is He really alive?

Later that day two of Jesus's disciples leave to go to Emmaus, which is about seven miles from Jerusalem, and on the road they meet as stranger – but they did not recognize that it was Jesus. (Luke 24:13-31) As they walked, Jesus opened their minds to all that was about Him in the Scriptures – and as they had a meal – and when Jesus broke the bread – they suddenly realized they were with the risen Lord Jesus – and He just disappeared.

That is where today's Holy Gospel picks up and things get even more amazing for the Apostles and their friends. Remember - picture yourself in that room - through the eyes of an apostle - when *"on the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors 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 side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*" (John 20:19-21) Up to this point most of them were going on the word of a few – but now the Risen Jesus was in their midst and showing them real proof. I am sorry but to describe the apostles as overjoyed probably doesn't really do the job. Right in front of them Jesus' promises were fulfilled – He had risen from the dead, just like He had said – and that is no small task! Has anyone here ever witnessed a friend coming back from the grave? What would your reaction be? Overjoyed or even more? I bet a little shock would be a part of your feelings, maybe even disbelief?

That is not the end of it – *"and with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are*

not forgiven." (John 20:22-23) Jesus was giving them a gift of the Holy Spirit – but not to the extent of what they would receive on the Day of Pentecost which gave them strength and confidence to go to the ends of the earth. Not only did Jesus breathe on them but He empowered them with an ordination to forgive sins and give absolution - and friends that is why in the church when a minister is ordained we receive the Holy Spirit to do our ministry – and on behalf of God to offer absolution and forgiveness of sins. For these Apostles there would be more to come in a little more than 40 days from that first day of the week – on the Day of Pentecost.

You can just imagine their excitement when Thomas, also known as Didymus or the twin, walked in and they told him what he had missed! Like the others who up to Jesus' appearance to them had only relied on what other people had experienced and told them – Thomas wanted more too. He wanted empirical or tangible evidence and not just hearsay. One week later they were all there and Jesus came into the locked room – offered them His Peace or Shalom – and made a "B-line" directly to Thomas. *"Then 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.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'"* (John 20:27-28) Thomas' reaction was like no other Apostle up to this point – he said *"My Lord and my God!"* After going through everything we listed today – can you imagine the relief and blessing that Thomas felt – with everything He witnessed for three years, and all of Jesus' promises being fulfilled right before his eyes?

Jesus is not done by any means – because He then blesses Thomas saying *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:29) That blessing went far beyond those in that locked upper room – it was a blessing to the generations of people to come who would believe as receiving the faith as described in the Epistle of Jude *"the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."* (Jude 1:3)

Then the Apostle John, who wrote this Gospel, tells the world that as astounding as this Gospel is – there is so much more that Jesus did that is not recorded but that the disciples witnessed. His intention of the accounts that he wrote are so that people might believe and that by believing you may have life in Jesus' Name. I for one am very grateful that we can read this Gospel and see the life of Jesus, the Messiah, through the eyes of an Apostle.