

John 20.19-31 Sermon / COB / 05.24.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]**: I want to try an experiment today. I apologize to our guests and new people, because this will seem weird, but bear with us for a couple of minutes and then we will settle back into a traditional sermon.
- I am going to give you some instructions, and when I say “go” I hope you will carry out those instructions; then when I say “stop” I want you to instantly become still and quiet. If you have trouble standing, then you can stay in your seat, but I hope everyone else will participate.
 - Here is the setting: You are the original disciples of Jesus. Jesus has just been crucified two days ago. You are in shock and despair. You don’t understand that Jesus has been resurrected; you think Jesus lost the battle and got himself killed. Now you are in this room together with the doors locked and the windows barricaded, because you are terrified, in fear for your lives.
 - You should have received a colored token when you came in. If you did not receive a token, then you can choose which group to join. If you got a blue token, I need you to come over to the piano side of the room; if you got a red token then come to the music pit; if you got a green token then come up by the altar.
 - The first group of people will be prayer warriors. You will all be praying out loud, all at the same time. I know that is not normal for us, but please do it for this exercise. Remember, you are begging God to save your lives and help you get through this tragedy.
 - The second group will be action warriors. You all will be arguing with each other about what to do now, all speaking in heated tones at once; do you hide, do you flee, do you fight, do you try to take over the Temple in the name of Jesus? You have a view and you need to push it aloud.
 - The third group will be worriers instead of warriors. I want you to walk around, fretting, saying things like, “Oh God, oh God, what should we do? Oh God, oh God, I’m so confused!”
 - Everyone ready? Go! [pause for a few seconds] Stop! Now imagine that instead of hearing me yell, you realized Jesus was standing here in the middle of the room! He is alive and right here in your midst! How would you react? What would you be feeling? Would you be shocked? Would you be surprised? Would you be excited, confused, joyful?
 - Ok, you can take your seats. Let’s see what we can learn from this and our passage for today...

[Slide 2: 20.19-20]: John 20.19-20 NASB: So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week [this is Sunday evening, the same day as the resurrection], and when the doors were shut [or locked] where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews [remember, this is how John refers to the Jewish religious leaders; the disciples were all Jewish, but they feared the religious leaders who had convicted Jesus and persuaded the Romans to crucify him... So the night of the resurrection, with the disciples together and the doors locked...], Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

- † The miracle of his resurrection from the dead provided for some interesting subsequent activities. We don’t know if he could glide through walls and locked doors or he opened the locked doors with

a word or he just appeared out of nowhere without any regard for walls and doors, but one second he was not there and then he was!

- My understanding of my own resurrection is that my body will be made whole and healthy, without corruption or weakness. I expect to have hair growing on my head instead of in my ears. So I'm surprised that Jesus' resurrected body showed the marks of the crucifixion; maybe the marks of his whipping too. Is that what we can expect, perfection but with scars from our ministry which are like badges of glory? or were these markings distinctly for Jesus, so that all could see that this risen Lord was none other than the crucified sacrificial lamb? I don't know!

† Let's think about something else. The night before his death, Jesus told the apostles that they should not be troubled, for he would give them peace, peace with God that allows us to experience peace inside. He told them in the world they would have trouble – ok, in life they would have trouble – but they should take courage, for he had overcome the world.

- Now he greeted them with the Hebrew, שָׁלוֹם [shah-LOME]. Try saying that with me... In Hebrew, you read normally, from right to left, not with that crazy recent innovation of left to right! שָׁלוֹם was a common greeting which hoped the other person would have safety, prosperity, health, peace with God, and peace with each other.
- In his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Jesus proved to be capable of keeping his promises: he had made peace with God the Father for his disciples, and now he encouraged them to find peace inside at knowing he had paid the penalty for their sins.
- That last night before his death, he also told them they would grieve, but then rejoice to see him again. This too was a promise that came true.

[Slide 3: 20.21-23]: John 20.21-23: So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

† There are three connected thoughts here, and it is important to see that they are connected:

- First, Jesus is sending his disciples to pursue the gospel mission just as God the Father sent him;
- Second, these disciples would receive the Holy Spirit to empower them in this mission; and
- Third, when the mission was successful such that others accepted the gospel truth about Jesus, they could know they had been forgiven by God the Father.
- Let me elaborate a little on each of these, so we understand what Jesus was saying.

† **[Slide 4: mission]:** The Son of God came to earth on a mission. Everything he taught, everything he did, especially his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection, were in pursuit of fulfilling his mission.

- The Son of God came as the man Jesus to fulfill God the Father's prophetic promises about a savior who would bring a New Covenant between God and mankind, which would include forgiveness of sins and reconciliation between God and people.
- We call this the gospel mission, because God's plan is to offer forgiveness, reconciliation, and salvation from sin to all those who accept the gospel promise, all those who believe the gospel truth about who Jesus is and what he accomplished for them in his crucifixion and resurrection.

- Part of Christ's gospel mission was to bring the original disciples to saving faith. Now Jesus says that just as God the Father sent him out on this mission, he is sending them. They have their salvation and peace with God, so now they will be sent to extend that grace to others.
 - They will live for this mission; they will rearrange their lives, their attitudes and priorities, their sense of right and wrong, all to pursue this mission whole-heartedly, so that they can lead others to faith in Christ.
 - Mankind's purpose always has been to glorify God through reflecting his character and representing him here on Earth, and part of that always has been to not only be the image of God here on Earth but to multiply it. In the church age, this purpose takes the form of sharing the gospel with everyone, so they too can come to faith in Christ and receive God's grace.
- † **[Slide 5: Spirit]**: Ok. That's the mission; but the mission requires equipping. We would not send Colby out to play baseball without his glove and bat, or Josh to rebuild a carburetor without tools and training. The gospel mission requires equipping of the Holy Spirit. On his last night before the crucifixion, Jesus told the apostles he would be sending the Holy Spirit to empower them so that they could testify about him in this gospel mission.
- Today we know the Spirit came upon the disciples *after* Jesus ascended to Heaven a few weeks later. So what is going on here in our scene?
 - This is cool. The verb for breathing, ἐμφυσάω, is used in two key passages of the Greek version of the Old Testament. In Genesis 2.7, God breathed life into Adam; in Ezekiel 37.9, there is a metaphor for God breathing spiritual life back into the people of Israel.
 - So Jesus breathes to symbolize that he is giving the disciples new spiritual life, which is further symbolized by, and empowered by, the indwelling Holy Spirit when he comes, in Acts 2.
 - When Jesus breathes in this scene, that represents what he is about to do when he sends the Holy Spirit from Heaven, just like when he washed their feet at the last supper to symbolize the spiritual cleansing he would offer them on the cross.
- † **[Slide 6: forgiveness]**: So Jesus is sending the disciples out to pursue the gospel mission of making more disciples, and he would provide the Holy Spirit to be with them and empower them on this mission. And that gives us the context for interpreting v.23.
- The disciples will go out to share the gospel with other people, promising them forgiveness of sins. When someone believes their testimony about the gospel, that person has received forgiveness from God and the disciples can say it is so.
 - I know you don't know anything about Greek verbs, and you probably care even less, but I have to mention something. In the Greek text, the verb form is called "a perfect," and we usually would translate that as you see here in the NASB: "their sins have been forgiven." Other English Bibles say "they are forgiven"; that also is a correct translation, but it can lead to confusion.
 - We can translate a Greek perfect into an English present verb, but the meaning is the same: we say "their sins *are* forgiven" to show their sins *have been* forgiven *and still are*. Either way, the meaning is the same, that what is happening on earth reflects what has happened in Heaven.
 - Hey, if none of that stuff about verbs makes sense to you, don't worry about it. The point here is that Jesus is sending out his disciples to pursue the gospel mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that others may receive God's grace and forgiveness.

† Last weekend, as Don's father lay on his deathbed, Deb was sharing the gospel truth with him, even though he already was a believer, because she wanted to encourage and comfort him about going to Heaven. At the same time, Deseon's aunt was bedridden in Hospice care, and he was unsure of her beliefs, so he boldly shared gospel truth with her, and was delighted to find she already believed, she already knew Jesus.

- This is our mission, to take the grace and forgiveness we have received and offer it to others. We share the gospel truth with fellow believers for comfort and instruction; we share it with others to offer them the same freedom and spiritual life that we experience.
- We do this in love for people and in love for Jesus; we accept his gospel mission because he saved us and empowered us with the Holy Spirit. And we can know that all he is asking of us is to share his truth, his offer of salvation; it is in God's hands whether people receive his grace and come to faith. So don't make this a high pressure situation for yourself: you are not going to go out and save anybody; your job is just to joyfully share the truth, and it will be up to God and the other person how they respond.

[Slide 7: 20.24-25]: John 20.24-25: But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus [which means "twin"], was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." [the Greek text is even more emphatic, something like, "I certainly never will believe!"]

† How many of you have heard of "Doubting Thomas"? it's a label even secular people use today. I think it's an unfair characterization. Before the crucifixion, Thomas was a faithful disciple of Jesus. Also, as have seen last week and this, other disciples, even Peter, struggled to believe in the resurrection until they saw Jesus with their own eyes. So it is not unusual that Thomas had doubts.

† What would you say if I told you I saw Elvis walking around Parkesburg yesterday or the Phillies were going to win the pennant this year or LeeAnn used to let a blindfolded fellow chop a watermelon off of her tummy with a sword . . . You would say, "I don't believe it! Show me the evidence!"

- That's what Thomas is saying. Now it's true that they have seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead already, but that's different: God was with Jesus then; how could they believe God was with Jesus now, after watching Jesus get arrested, condemned, beaten, whipped, and crucified to death? Remember, they didn't fully understand Jesus' teaching about this, and they were suffering through emotional and intellectual shock, locked in a room frightened for their lives.
- So none of them believed in the resurrection at first, but then Jesus appeared to them; and Thomas missed out.

[Slide 8: 20.26-28]: John 20.26-28: After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut [or locked], and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

- † Let me ask you, does Jesus seem angry with Thomas? Does Jesus chastise Thomas? I don't think so. I think he meets Thomas where he is and gives Thomas what he needs. *I think he meets Thomas where he is and gives Thomas what he needs.*
 - Jesus comes to Thomas, reveals himself in the way Thomas needs to see him, and brings Thomas to saving faith. That's how Jesus works.
 - When someone we know is struggling with doubt, let us be as gracious, gentle, and loving, as we help them see the reality of Jesus through our testimony and the testimony of the gospel.
- † Thomas' reaction was one of the best confessions of faith in the Bible: "My Lord and my God!"
 - Upon seeing Jesus, Thomas not only believed in the resurrection, he realized that the resurrection proved the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. We talked about that last week, but here we see Thomas verify this interpretation of the resurrection.
 - We also see Thomas model how we should look at Jesus today: as our Lord and our God! Maybe we should call him, "Faithful Thomas" from now on. Surely we should be approaching Jesus like Thomas did here, as God, as the fully divine Son of God; and also as our human master or lord, our king. What do you need to change in how you treat Jesus in your life?

[Slide 9: 20.29]: John 20.29: Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

- † When John wrote this gospel, there was no punctuation in the written Greek language; and the regular use of question marks didn't start until about eight or nine hundred years later. So all the earliest manuscripts we have of the New Testament do not indicate where question marks or periods would go.
 - Usually it is obvious whether a sentence is a question or not, because of the diction, the word order, and the narrative context. But here, we are not sure whether Jesus phrased this as a question or as a sentence. The NASB, NET, and ESV all have Jesus asking a question: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed?" The HCSB, NIV, NLT, NKJV have Jesus making a statement: "Because you have seen Me, you have believed."
 - It doesn't matter much, but if Jesus made it a question, it sounds more like his is displeased. So I want to emphasize that I don't think he is. We said Jesus met Thomas where he was and gave him what he needed to believe, without chastising him. And here I think that continues...
 - Thomas just came to saving faith in the resurrected Christ, so Jesus plays off of that to make a point, that they all have believed now that they have seen him, but now he is sending them out to spread the good news, and they will be talking to people who will not get to see Jesus. So blessed will be they, who believe the testimony of the disciples, and thus believe in Jesus as the savior, despite never getting to see him in person.
 - If you are a Christian, you are one of those who are blessed to believe, even though you have not seen the resurrected Christ. You have heard the testimony of the apostles about the good news of salvation offered through Jesus the Christ, and you responded in faith.

[Slide 10: 20.30-31]: John 20.30-31: Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God [like Thomas said]; and that believing you may have life in His name.

- † This is the purpose statement of this book. This tells us why John wrote. But it also builds on what we have just learned.
 - John wrote this book so that you could know the facts about Jesus, about who he said he was and what he said he would do in his crucifixion and resurrection, and about the miraculous signs he did to prove these things were true, and – knowing those facts – you would believe in Jesus as your savior, and have eternal spiritual life in his name.
 - John wrote this book because he wanted you to be one of the blessed people who would believe in Jesus – even though you haven’t seen him – because you heard the testimony of those apostles whom Jesus sent out to continue the gospel mission by starting the church.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 11: greatest sign]**: I thought about going back through all the miraculous signs in this gospel, and what they proved about Jesus. And you can do that with the devotions we now have for the whole gospel.
 - But the greatest sign was the resurrection. As I said last week, even skeptical scholars, atheists acknowledge that Jesus lived and was crucified. If you can believe in his resurrection, you can believe that he is who he said he was and did what he said he would; and thus you can accept his gift of salvation through faith.
 - Let’s pray...