

A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday April 24, 2022

John 20:19-31

Last Sunday, Easter, we were greeted with the joyful news that the tomb was empty, that Jesus was risen, and that he would go ahead of us and we would see him.

And into that room, not once, but twice Jesus came and stood amongst them, and his words were: Peace be to you.

Peace – the shalom of God.

Peace/shalom is that big word that encompasses health and wholeness, salvation and every good blessing.

"Peace – be with you."

And as the disciples receive this blessing of wholeness, life and peace, Jesus continues; "As the Father sent me, I am sending you."

And always, that is our mission.

As the Father sent Jesus into the world to bring new life, so we are sent by Jesus into the world.

Thomas was not with the others the first time Jesus came.

There are a few things I would invite you to notice about this scripture.

First, is that the disciples were not different from us.

If I told you that I saw Jesus, that he came to my house and had dinner with me, you would be skeptical at best, and more likely invite me to go for a drive to the hospital and get checked out by the psychiatric unit.

Dead people don't walk around, they don't eat with us, that doesn't happen, usually.

Thomas, is very much like us – unless I see it for myself I'm not going to believe it.

But notice that belief in the resurrection of Jesus has evidence.

There are many witnesses, over many days.

The Apostle Paul says that Jesus appeared to as many as 500 and that the people in the early church could speak to those to eye witnesses.

There was a debate about the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus in the 1990's

A panel of independent philosophers from various universities served as judges of the debate's content.

After the debate one judge commented:

"I conclude that the historical evidence is strong enough to lead reasonable minds to conclude that Christ did indeed rise from the dead..."

But notice also in this passage this morning that Jesus doesn't get angry at Thomas' unbelief.

Jesus doesn't write him off, or give up on him, or scold him, or just appear to the others.

Jesus comes specifically to Thomas in his doubt, and shows him mercy and love.

Jesus, who had lived with these people, who had given his life for them, comes again to teach them, to heal them, tenderly he speaks to Thomas personally.

And we get the feeling that Jesus was in the room all the time.

The disciples saw Jesus, and then he was gone from their view, but he heard Thomas loud and clear, and knows the heart of a fearful disciple.

And suddenly Jesus is in their midst again, and he speaks directly to Thomas and his need.

"Thomas, come and see the nail holes in my hands, and put your hand in the scars in my side."

See for yourself.

And Thomas responds with the confession of faith; "My Lord and my God."

If you have honest doubts, bring them to the Lord.

If you know someone who is truly seeking, and having trouble, know that Jesus understands.

If you just want an argument, and will never be satisfied, that's a whole different matter.

But to those who seek, Jesus promises them, they will find.

And Thomas, wrestling honestly with faith and doubt, Jesus comes to him. Thomas isn't left to figure it out, to somehow attain faith, Jesus comes to him. Faith is impossible for us, except that tenderly, in love and mercy, Jesus comes to us, and reveals himself to us.

Jesus still comes to struggling, doubting disciples, and he still speaks words of "shalom" to us, and then sends us to continue his mission to the world.

What does it look like to bring Jesus' healing presence into this world today?

Through the centuries God's people have made two mistakes.

Sometimes we have said; all you need is Jesus, and we've ignored that people need food, and housing and health care.

Having Jesus in our lives means we are generous, serving and caring for others, especially those in need.

Other times we have ignored that for real peace, healing, wholeness, to come, a bed and a meal are not enough.

Life, hope, healing come only in and through Jesus.

Our mission, given to us by Jesus, is to fill the world with people who follow him.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, you come to us, mercifully, tenderly, in love, calming our fears, speaking your word of Shalom, peace, wholeness, health, into our darkness. When we doubt, you answer us, when we don't understand you remind us that the tomb is empty, that you raised Jesus from death to life, and one day you will raise us up also. Show us how to share this good news with others. Show us how we can serve your mission today where we are . Amen