

JESUS LIVES!

The Sunday after Easter

April 19, 2009

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Hecla

Zion Lutheran Church, Ipswich

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bowdle

Text: John 20:19-31 *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." Now when he had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to 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, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained."*

But Thomas, called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presences of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Theme: THE RISEN LORD ENTERS THROUGH CLOSED DOORS!

- Showing His divinity
- Opening hearts
 - Thomas'
 - Our own
 - Others

In the name of Him who once was dead, but now lives and reigns eternally to save, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, dear fellow redeemed in His name,

It's often fun to fantasize about being a super-hero. Especially as children, it's fun to put on a cape and pretend to be Superman. We would love to be like Spider Man and swing from skyscraper to skyscraper. The thought of being able to fly through the sky or stop a bullet with our bare hands, captivates our imagination. If we were Superman we could round up all those Somali pirates and rescue their captives or end terrorism so our soldiers could come home.

How would you use your super-powers? No one would ever hurt or harm us or our families. No one would ever make fun of us again. That bully at school would be put in his

place. We would show off our new found powers to our friends. And for once in our life, everyone would be jealous of the things we could do.

Of course, super-heros are the things of comic books and movies - they belong in the land of make-believe. There has only been one man who walked the earth that did have super-human powers. His name was Jesus of Nazareth. He had the power to walk on water, to calm storms, and to raise the dead. Jesus could do this because He was true God and true Man. However for the first 33 years of His life Jesus never used His almighty power to serve Himself. If and when Jesus used His divine power it was for the good of His neighbor and for the glory of God. When the 5,000 were hungry He fed them with only two fish and five loaves of bread. When Mary and Martha were weeping over their dead brother Lazarus, Jesus raised Him from the dead.

Even when Jesus' life was in danger, He didn't use His power for His own good. When Jesus was mocked on the cross for being able to save others but not being able to save Himself, Jesus did not destroy those blasphemers with fire from heaven - though He could have. Jesus most certainly had the power to come down from the cross - but that would have served only Himself and not us. Nor would Him coming down from the cross glorified God, for it was God's will that He die in this way.

We refer to the period of Jesus life from His conception to His death on the cross as His humiliation. During this time the Divine Son of God humbled Himself and took on a servants form. He served His Father and He served His fellow man. Though He was the eternal Son of God, Jesus did not use His divine power for His own benefit.

But on Easter morning that all changed. When Jesus rose from the dead His time of humiliation was over. We refer to the time of His resurrection until today as His period of exaltation. During this time He freely made use of His divine powers. When He spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus caused them not to recognize Him as Jesus. When they did recognize Him as Jesus, He then disappeared from their midst. The resurrected and exalted Jesus could appear and disappear as He pleased.

We see this in our text for this the Sunday after Easter. Twice in our text, we hear of the resurrected Lord simply appearing in the midst of the disciples. On the first occasion on the evening of Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared in the midst of 10 disciples without using a door. A week later Jesus appeared to the disciples and Thomas though the door was again shut. So let us consider how the resurrected Lord enters through closed doors - both literally and spiritually. May we rightly consider this Word of God, that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing we may have life in Him. May God then help us to share this message of life with others!

SHOWING HIS DIVINITY

I'm sure there is at least one person here who has tried to walk through a screed door or glass sliding door at least once in their life. Maybe this is something that has happened to many of you. Shows like America's Funniest Home Videos proves that many people have tried to walk through closed doors. But I guarantee that each one of them happened by accident. No one would purposefully try to enter a room through a closed door. It's impossible for any of us to do that.

During His period of humiliation Jesus never walked through walls or through closed doors. His divine nature was confined to a body just like ours. However as the risen Lord of Life, He was no longer bound by the confines of time and space. The resurrected Jesus was no

ghost, He still had His human body. Jesus showed His disciples His hands and feet and ate food just like a normal human being to prove He was not a ghost. But the resurrected Lord was now exalted and used His divine power to transport Himself, making Himself appear and disappear as He pleased. He could pass through closed doors and thick walls. These are things that no human being can do. Nor does a spirit-being have flesh and blood or eat food as Jesus did. This matter of walking through doors shows that Jesus is both true God and true Man.

OPENING HEARTS

Now, we said that there were two occasions in our text of Jesus walking through closed doors. The first occasion was on Easter eve and the second was a week later. But if you read carefully you will find that there actually are three occasions of Jesus walking through closed doors. Can you find the third in our text? No? Well allow me to explain - the third closed door is not made of wood and nail, but of flesh and blood. The third closed door is the heart of Thomas.

At that first appearance of Jesus on Easter night to the disciples, Thomas was not present. After the 10 disciples had told Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas replied defiantly, ***“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nail, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*** We often refer to Thomas as “Doubting Thomas.” But really there is more than doubt here. Thomas defiantly refused to believe! He gave three specific requirements that had to be met for him to believe - seeing the nail holes, touching the nail holes, and putting his hand into Jesus’ side where the soldiers spear went. Unless these three requirements were met - **“I WILL NOT BELIEVE!”** he said.

The risen Lord passed through this third door too. A week after Easter Jesus once again appeared in the midst of the disciples, this time Thomas was present. The risen Lord demonstrates that He knows all things. The risen and omniscient Lord said to Thomas, ***“Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”*** He knew that Thomas said he refused to believe unless his three requirements were met and He offers Himself to Thomas. Thomas answered, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** The risen Lord entered through yet another closed door. Thomas had closed the door to his heart and refused to believe the witness of the other disciples. But the risen Lord enters the heart of Thomas and brings him to faith.

We are often left scratching our heads about Thomas. Here was one of the 12 Disciples. One of those who was closest to Jesus and saw all the many miracles Jesus did. As one of the 12 Thomas himself had been sent out by Jesus to preach the kingdom of God. Thomas had healed the sick and cast out demons in Jesus’ name. Why was it so hard for Thomas to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? Why did he refuse to believe the witnesses of his fellow disciples and demand visible evidence of Jesus’ resurrection?

Do you know anyone like Thomas in your life? Maybe there is a Thomas sitting next to you or behind you or in front of you. Maybe you have a cousin or co-worker that is a Thomas, someone who just refuses to believe in Jesus for lack of visible proof. But if you really want to see a good example of a Thomas, all you need to do is look in the mirror. Each one of us is by nature a Thomas - one whose heart was closed to the promises of God. Maybe you can remember a time in your life when you said you would never believe in Jesus unless Jesus proved Himself to you. Or maybe your time as a Thomas was in your infancy. Each one of us

was born with a heart closed to the resurrected Jesus. A heart which depended on the visible than on faith in the unseen.

What happened to you and what happened to Thomas? The risen Lord happened. Just as the risen Lord came and announced "Peace" to Thomas and the disciples, the risen Lord has come and announced "Peace" to you through His Word. By His Word He came and showed you His hands and His side. He showed you the cost of your forgiveness. He showed you the nail holes which were left by the sacrifice He made for your sin. And now the risen Lord says "Peace to you." Peace between you and God has been established through His death and resurrection.

The reason you call Jesus your Lord and your God today, is because Jesus came through the closed door of your heart. Working through the Word He entered your heart and there created faith. Faith which believes Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And believing you have life - eternal, everlasting life - in His name!

We all know other people like Thomas. People who for whatever reason say they need tangible proof of Jesus. They need to see Him with their own eyes and touch Him with their hands before they will believe in Him. And we who believe and love Jesus want so very much for them have that same love and enjoy the fruits of His salvation. So we try to think of clever ways of convincing them that Jesus is the only Savior from sin.

What is the problem there? Who is it that is try to walk through closed doors? WE are with OUR clever arguments. But we can't walk through walls and closed doors - only the risen Lord Jesus can! It is only Jesus who can enter through the closed heart of sinful man. He does it in the same way He did it with you - through His Word. Working through the Word the risen Lord announces peace to troubled consciences. Through the Gospel in both spoken Word and the Gospel in Sacrament Jesus shows them His hands and His side. Through the Word He shows them the cost of their salvation. John says in the last verse of our text, "***These (words) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.***"

This is the work that Jesus has sent us to do. He does not call on us to enter through the closed door of people's hearts, He sends us simply to preach the peace of the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins in His name. "***As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.***" It is Jesus who through that Word can enter through the closed door. He did it to Thomas and He did it to you. May God help us and grant us open doors to testify of our risen Lord and God who enters through closed doors! Jesus lives! Amen!