

Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Dear Fellow Blessed, **Peace be to you**, from Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God.

On this second week of Easter the theme is "faith."

It is a theme that can often lead Christians into 1 of 2 directions:

either to pride and arrogance over their perceived strength of faith
or to anxiety and fear because of their perceived weakness of faith.

But both of these reactions stem from our sinful human nature,
and thankfully, both of them have been overcome by Jesus.

So then there is a 3rd & profitable response when talking of faith, one of humility and peace.

As follows in Jesus' name:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Thomas was 1 of 12 hand-picked by our Lord to be an apostle,
to be "sent out" to preach and teach about Him and His work.

He is often called "Doubting Thomas," a catchy moniker.

Only, that isn't the word that Jesus used to describe him.

Jesus actually said, "**Do not be unbelieving...**"

Poor Thomas. He lived in self-inflicted denial and unbelief for 8 more days than the rest of them.

Though the others had told him, "**We have seen the Lord,**"

he refused to believe... unless Jesus met His demands.

What do you suppose the others might've thought about Thomas?

Perhaps a little indignation that he wouldn't believe them.

Maybe some pride that Jesus had shown Himself to them and
not to Thomas, let alone the rest of Jerusalem & the Jews.

Might there have been a growing desire to "cut him loose,"
since he didn't believe in Jesus' resurrection?

Could there have been a little anxiety that Thomas was in danger of God rejecting Him,
because he was rejecting God?

What do you suppose was Thomas' attitude toward the others?

Perhaps a little exasperation with the others all "forcing this resurrection thing down his throat."

Maybe some pride that he was a realist while the others were living in their own fantasy world.

Might there have been a sinking feeling that Jesus no longer desired him,
since He appeared to the others w/o him... that he was no longer welcome among them?

Could there have been a little anxiety that they were telling the truth & he was actually rejecting God?
A little shame in rashly blurting out something he didn't mean, but was too proud to take it back?

We don't know the answers to these questions, but it doesn't hurt to realize that these were real people with real emotions, concerns, and issues.

They were also all sinners, and though from a very different culture and time and place than yourself, very much the same when it comes to the sinful nature.

The reality was that something was dividing Thomas from the rest: his sin of unbelief.

But this was nothing for the other 10 to be proud of.

They were in a similar situation just 8 days earlier.

They, too, did not believe Jesus would rise, though He had promised He would.

They, too, doubted His messengers, the women's words that Jesus had risen as the angels said.

Even their belief was not something they could boast about.

They didn't bring themselves to faith, to trust.

They didn't make a decision to "just believe" Jesus rose.

Jesus Himself came to them in His risen flesh; He spoke to them;

He let Himself be touched by them and ate with them;

He breathed on them & gave them the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had given them evidence/proof to put their faith in — in other words: He gave them Himself.

And so too, we see Jesus do the same with "Doubting Thomas."

Jesus brought him from the unbelief of death to **life in His name**.

He had heard Thomas' bold ultimatum the previous week.

He could rightfully have rejected Thomas then and there,

but He patiently bears with the weakness of our flesh.

Instead, Jesus lovingly offered Thomas the ability to touch

His holy wounds and so be relieved of his proud unbelief.

In that instant, however, Thomas realized his folly.

He immediately abandoned his foolish demands and confessed "**My Lord and my God!**"

What a blessing that Jesus didn't drive Thomas from the others.

What a blessing that Thomas didn't abandon/reject them, either.

What a blessing that though he initially rejected the resurrection,

Jesus didn't reject him, but bore him up and restored him.

In our times of sin and weakness, Jesus also bears with us.

The sin of unbelief and our propensity to doubt His Word is not a trivial or light matter.

Unbelief divides you from the Church, from the body of Christ.

Unbelief divides you from Jesus, from God Himself who has said, "**You shall have no other gods.**"

As Luther so aptly explained it, that means you **fear** nothing,

(Ex.20:3)

love nothing, and **trust** nothing other than God.

Yet if you have doubt or unbelief, then you are trusting someone or something other than what God has revealed.

And what has God revealed to us?

That **Jesus is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.**" (1Tim.4:10)

Here St. Paul says Jesus died for all people, but that only those who believe will receive His salvation. So then, we see how "trivial" God considers lack of faith to be, that those who reject His salvation will needlessly suffer. It is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

...
Jesus knows your inability to raise yourself to life,

to bring yourself out of unbelief to trust in God & His Word.

He knows your weakness even to remain in Him.

And so, as with the disciples and with Thomas, and the rest of the world, Jesus came for you.

He came to bear the weaknesses of your flesh,

by bearing that flesh Himself as He was conceived and born.

Where you have foolishly ignored Him, Jesus came to fear God;

Where you have rejected Him, Jesus came to love God;

Where you have not believed, Jesus came to trust God... to take Him at His revealed Word even though He knew it meant His suffering, death, and burial.

He came, not for Himself, but for you.

And so He came to life again, not for Himself, but for you, and speaks to you in order to comfort you; to say to you in your doubt and unbelieving, "**Peace be to You.** Your sins are forgiven."

And not only has He come for you, He Himself still comes to you.

In your times of weakness (which for those who are not paying attention is all the time),

He comes to give Himself to you, to give you His strength.

He comes to give you His perfect life in place of your own.

And He comes in great patience.

Though He comes and can be received every day, every hour, as you meditate on His Word, He promises to come where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name.^(Matt.18:20)

He comes every week, on **the first day of the week** [Sunday], where the disciples [are] assembled, and stands in [our] midst and says to you through His "sent one" [ministers] "**Peace be with you.**"

He comes as your crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

He comes in His flesh, to share a meal with you,

a meal to put away your doubts and unbelief in forgiveness,

a meal to strengthen your weak faith, to raise you up and enliven what has died.

Though He comes invisible to the naked eye,

He comes to bless "**those who have not seen, and yet have believed.**"

He comes to be your Savior, your Lord, and your God.

Do you have no faith?

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.

Is your faith weak? You are not without someone to bear you up.

You have a strong Jesus.

Do you struggle with doubt and unbelief?

You are not without a Savior, who has commanded His ministers to speak in His stead,
to announce & declare to you, "Your sins are forgiven you."

Is your faith strong? Are you proud of it?

You have nothing to boast in, but in your merciful Jesus.

Do you have anxiety? You have nothing to fear.

You have a personal Jesus who comes to you in peace.

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Soli Deo Gloria