

Sermon Easter 2 2020

April 19, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read. Amen.

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. What a statement for John to make. In fact, he says at the end his Gospel that he has seen these things, and the many things that Jesus did. The things so numerous that **“the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”** But *these* were written that you might believe. Think about the implications for that.

When we think of believing things we think about believing the things we observe. We think about that which I can touch, which I can see, which I can feel, taste, or hear. And in his first letter, John makes the point that he did all of those with Jesus there. He saw Him, He felt the concreteness of the body in which dwelt with us God in the flesh. He heard Him. Jesus was manifest concretely before John. But for us these things were written that we might believe. Of course our Lord says it's a blessing that we would not see but yet believe, and so John wrote for us. But these things were written that we might believe.

As we say that however, we do see in this story the disciples in a position where they didn't necessarily believe. And I don't just mean Thomas. That's certainly important in its own right, but no, all of the disciples. I mentioned this last week that we would see this, that we would see the disciples locked up for fear, and here it is. The night of the resurrection of Jesus has come, and they don't properly believe yet either. They've heard the news, they're likely hoping against hope that it's true, but they don't believe just yet.

And to be fair, in those circumstances they didn't have good reason to believe, did they? After all, how many people have you seen rise from the dead? I'm guessing you haven't seen any. Now, they had seen more than that. After all, they had witnessed Lazarus's resurrection, they had seen the boy in the funeral procession in Nain. There was Jairus' daughter. But Jesus had raised all of those people, and now He Himself was dead.

But there was hope. Peter and John had seen the tomb empty. Mary Magdalene had seen the Lord. I'm guessing that's why they were gathering together. I'm guessing they were congregating to discuss what this might mean, if it could be real. But even with this glimmer of hope, what is their default? Fear. It is in fear they're gathered together. Not only does John make the point that it's fear, he drives it home with the statement that the doors are locked.

So here it is, Jesus has risen, but that's not what their circumstances told them, that's not what their observations told them, and it's not what their feelings told them. Now if you know me, you know that I often speak of emotion in contrast to the faith. In America we have a very emotionally driven faith. One can know that their faith is genuine if it is felt. In particular, we call it heartfelt. One can know that they believe if they really feel it. And even beyond American Churches, if you feel anything with sufficient passion then that passion is sincere and cannot be questioned.

I've made the point before, but this is a shaky ground. And I've shown that with this story before, but I'll say it again. It's the theoretical example of the man and his wife who goes on the airplane. The man drops off his wife at the airport. They're running behind, but she should be able to make it without too much problem. As he's driving home, he's listening to the radio where they interrupt to report that there's been a crash on the runway. There's been a plane that has caught fire and none of the people have survived. They then say which plane it is. It's the one he dropped his wife off to catch. The man is devastated. Utterly crushed. He doesn't know what to think, what to say. Immense and very real grief instantaneously overcomes him. Then he hears his phone ringing. It says that the call is from his wife. He answers it hopefully. On the other end his wife's voice comes through. It turns out that she got caught in security and missed the plane. The man is now overjoyed. Consumed with such bliss that he can't contain himself, such happiness that again he's overcome.

Now these were both very real emotions that the man felt. He felt them based on the information that he had. But the one emotion was grounded in the false assumption that his wife was on the plane. It wasn't an ungrounded assumption, but it was wrong. Likewise the joy that he felt at hearing his wife's voice was influenced by that same assumption. It's not wrong for him to feel that

joy, but in the reality of what happened, it's something that exists because of what he thought was true moments before.

And hopefully then you can see how emotions can be so easily falsified. But Jesus in our lesson comes and shows the reality of the situation to the disciples. Here they are in fear, and He shows them that this fear is not the reality. He shows them that the reality is His life. The reality is His victory over sin, death, and the devil, like I talked about last week.

In fact, in the Old Testament Lesson, we see such a great picture of this. There is this passage, the vision given to Ezekiel of the valley of the dry bones. In this, Ezekiel see all these bones there. And the point is made that the bones are dry. They are dead. There's no hope for their life. They don't have sinews and muscles and skin. No, it's just bones. And bones don't live on their own. And this symbolizes what the Israelites felt at the time of Ezekiel. It says it there, **"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.'"** It felt to them like there was no hope. Our hope is lost, our bones are dried up.

But then what? Ezekiel preached over those bones. He proclaimed God's Word and the bones were brought to life by that word. They were raised and the sinews went back on them, and the flesh on the sinews, and the skin over the flesh. And then the Spirit breathed breath back into them, a play on words here as Spirit in Hebrew—and in Greek for that matter—is the same word as breath. When the Breath of God came through the Word, that Breath, that Spirit brought life into them. And how? Through the Word itself.

Of course while this is a picture for the hope that Israel was to have, this is our hope to. We are dead in our trespasses and sin, but there is life in Jesus. Life in this resurrection that Jesus was proving to the disciples. And just as He showed them that life, that resurrection, that victory through His cross and through His being raised, He shows you as well. How?

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. When the Holy Spirit inspired John to pen this section of His Gospel, He was doing that for you. In fact, as John says this is written, there is an authority that goes with that biblically. Look at Exodus where God writes down His covenant on the tablets for Moses,

where Moses writes down God's Commands. Look in Joshua 24 and I Samuel 10 where Joshua and Samuel do the same. There it is, this writing is authoritative for you.

So what's the take away? Trust these words, trust this writing, trust this resurrection over and against what you feel right now. I have a friend on Facebook who recently lost her husband. It breaks my heart because he was only forty and died of a heart attack. It was so sudden, so unexpected. And now she's living in the midst of this quarantine. You can see how difficult all of this is for her, but I so appreciate her posts. She keeps saying how thankful she is that her faith isn't dependent upon how she feels. What a great example.

The reality of our security in this isn't dependent upon how we feel about whether we'll get the coronavirus or not. The reality of our provision isn't dependent upon how quickly the economy is able to absorb the taxing it's receiving. The reality of our fate in all of this isn't dependent upon the fear that we know now. No, it's resting upon the promise of our Lord Jesus that He has risen from the dead. It's resting upon the resurrection of Jesus who has in that resurrection proven to us that He has overcome the world and all of the troubles in it. The reality of our fate, Christians, rests in the promise that you have been joined to Him in Baptism, such that you were buried there and are joined to the body of the One who's head is already above ground and at the right hand of the Father.

Whether you feel this or not, doesn't matter. It's true. It's objective. It's reality. And it's been written that you would believe. Yes Christians, **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.** Believe, then, that Word and know that is true, life for you in Jesus Name, life for you in His resurrection. Life for you without fear. Amen.