

John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said

to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This passage is so rich. This passage informs us about the very essence of faith. First, we have the great commission – as the Father has sent me so I send you – this is the act or action of faith.

Then we have the question of the nature of faith – this is expressed in contrast to Thomas’ unbelief – “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

And finally, we have a definitive statement of the substance of our faith – what it is that we believe in – we find this in Thomas’ exclamation – my Lord and my God!

So, but what better way to spend this first Sunday after Easter than discussing these aspects of faith – what it means to live faith – what it means to have faith – and what it is that defines our faith.

Are passage today begins with Jesus, giving his disciples the great commission – a very specific commission. He says to his disciples “As my father sent me. I send you.”

God sent Jesus for God so loved the world. And Jesus loved – he loved his followers and those who came to him seeking help. But he did so much more than that – he loved even those who betrayed him... those who killed him. God sent Jesus to love – we, in turn, are sent by Jesus to love.

God sent Jesus to heal this broken world. He did that through miracles – curing the leper, making the lame walk – raising the dead. We too are sent to heal a broken world – to perform healing miracles. Perhaps nothing as visually dramatic as making the lame walk or the blind see. But we have the power to perform miracles of healing... healing broken souls – embracing lonely souls. We may not make the lame walk, but we can certainly walk with those in need. And as for sight we too can make the blind to see. We

can reveal God's love through our actions. So that others may see the world as we do. Have a vision of the world – of creation – of one another as beloved of God.

God sent Jesus to change things – to shake things up – to turn things on their heads. Remember those beatitudes. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth – not the strong and powerful not the rich and the influential but the meek and the mild! God sent Jesus to change the world – to change our relationship with him. And also to change our relationships with one another. So if Jesus was sent by God to change things – then surely we are sent by Jesus to change things. We can change perceptions and attitudes. We can change priorities and values. We can change our world.

And how are we to do all this – to love, to heal and to change - Well Christ gave us the tool – the Holy Spirit. In today's passage Christ says receive the Holy Spirit, and he breathed on them. Those huddled scared disciples are transfigured by this experience: they have changed; they have been inspired; they believe. We too have been touched by the Holy Spirit. We cannot see it, but it's there nonetheless – leading to inspire our actions, magnify our dreams and strengthen our resolve.

And this is where we come to doubting Thomas. Poor Thomas missed the first appearance of the Risen Jesus. So he remained unchanged. He remained convinced of the facts as he knew them – Jesus had been killed. For Thomas was a practical man. He was rational, he put his faith in his senses for Thomas seeing was believing.

But then again, finally, when Jesus did appear in his presence, even then seeing wasn't believing for Thomas. He had to put his hand in Christ's – he had to feel the flesh-- the damage and brutalized flesh of Jesus. How intimate? How intrusive? Putting his hand into Christ's wounds. That is what Thomas wanted ... definitive proof. Proof that he could feel that he could literally and intellectually grasp on to. Proof that was so undeniable it could only bear one explanation – that this was Jesus – Jesus who have been pierced in the side and nailed through the hands – this was that very Jesus standing before him.

Thomas is a figure very familiar to us, because he is still with us today. We know people like that don't mean? The Thomases of this world want absolute proof. They want simple concrete undeniable answers – answers that only have one possible explanation. And as we know, in our world

there are seldom easy answers. So what does a doubting Thomas do when faced with the Genesis creation story which resonates with his soul and Darwin's theory of evolution which speaks to his reason? What does Doubting Thomas do when faced with the testimonies of miracles versus the empirical data of science? What does Doubting Tom do when faced with the good news of Jesus and with a society full of hatred and judgment and exclusion?

Well, what doubting Thomas can do is one of two things. He can run screaming into the night – totally unable to accept the unacceptable. Or imagine the unimaginable. Or he can call up from his very soul. Something that transcends the senses – something that transcends reason – he can call up that instinct within himself, which can see the unseen and can imagine the unimaginable.

Each and every human being has this capacity. That part which makes us love, and laugh and cry. It is that part of us which sees beauty, which can see in a majestic sunset, the touch of God's hand or in a thundercloud the awesome power of God. It is that part of us which drives us to make connections with one another. It is that part of us, which compels us to seek

a connection with God – it is that part of us in which lies our faith. Our faith – our faith that Jesus is my Lord and my God.

That is our Faith – that God exists and that Jesus was and is God incarnate. Our faith that they love us – a love that sometimes we are too blind to see – too doubting to believe. But it is there waiting for us whether or not we believe. God’s love – Jesus’ love – is patient and steadfast, waiting as we go through our doubts, our misgivings our learnings – it is still there waiting for us. Just waiting for us. Waiting for us to turn and believe.

For that is what we are being asked in this passage - we are being asked to believe in and to embrace Christ as our Savior. And to act on that belief. We know this because the author John does not mince his words. He steps out of his role as narrator and tells us why he told us his story and what we are to do with it. So let us hear again, the last words of this paragraph passage :

That Jesus did many other things in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that true believing. You may have life in his name.