

Acts 5:27-32
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

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¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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." ²⁷Then 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." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

Confidence has gotten a lot of publicity. People are more likely to buy self-help books and attend seminars that teach them how to be confident than they are to study the subject they are trying to have confidence about. It sometimes seems to be more important to be sure than to be right. Confidence seems to be more desirable than competence.

Christianity is not immune to this circumstance. Depth of faith is often measured in confidence. A preacher is more likely to get a favorable hearing with a message of “positive thinking” than he is with a story about Jesus on a cross. Crosses are dismal and difficult to fit into a successful lifestyle. So we might ignore the cross and hear the good news of Jesus Christ presented as an aid to better living. Something to make you a better person, give your children good moral values, help you do better in school, or maybe win a ball game. I heard a fellow on television say that we should remember that the word *Lent* is spelled L-E-N-T and L-E-N-T stands for “Let’s End Negative Thinking”.

Christianity has been identified with a confident shout of “I’m saved” – to such an extent that we may be a little hesitant to admit that we are Christians. We are not anxious to be thought of as “one of those” because it can be hard to tell the difference between being confident and being judgmental. If I am *confident* that I am right and you disagree with me ... well. A survey by Lifeway Research said that 17% of people who do not go to church anymore stopped going because their fellow church goers were judgmental. (The only reason given more frequently was being too busy.) The thinking seems to be, “If having a relationship with Jesus means that I need to smugly reject everyone else and celebrate my superiority – then I would rather keep my relationship with Jesus quiet.” A conspicuous Christian is not always good news.

Still, confidence is viewed as a position of strength, so, confidence has gotten a lot of publicity, and a lot of us who should know better have assumed that it is probably true. Depth of faith can be thought of as a way of claiming, “I know I am right.” We are in trouble when we confuse self-assurance with the grace of God. We start equating the good news with winning argument. (Don’t self-assured people win arguments?) Christians fear teaching Sunday School because they are afraid a member of the class might ask a question they do not know the answer to. (Don’t confident people know all the answers?) And, worst of all, we

feel that unless we are confident – Jesus will not be part of our lives. As if we have to achieve a particular level of certainty before Jesus will think we are worth his time.

Our Gospel lesson this morning tells the story of the first Easter (a story to give us confidence if ever there was one.) But this is not the story of what took place at the empty tomb. This is the story of what Jesus' disciples were doing away from the scene of victory. The disciples were afraid. They had hidden in a room and locked the doors. "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..." These disciples were not sitting around trying to generate enough positive thinking to be worthy of God. They were not planning their next step toward victorious living. They had seen their teacher killed. They were afraid and hopeless and all they could think to do about it was hide and lock the door.

That is where Jesus found them. Jesus came looking for them. He did not seek out the confident and the assured. Jesus defeated death and he went looking for the lost and the unhappy. He found them and his first words were, "Peace be with you." Lost and unhappy people need the peace of God.

Not all the lost and unhappy people were in that locked room in Jerusalem on the afternoon of the first Easter Sunday. Thomas was missing. The other disciples told him the good news. "Jesus is alive." "Death is defeated." "The peace of God is offered to all of us." Even with that message – Thomas was *not* confident. (He is called Doubting Thomas, you know. No one has ever called him "Self-Assured Thomas".) Thomas said, "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."

A week later, it was the first Sunday after Easter, the disciples were together and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus came again. Jesus was not discouraged by the doubts of his followers. He came repeating the message he had said before, "Peace be with you."

His followers still needed to hear it. Jesus 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.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God.”

We spend a lot of time praising confidence – but Jesus went looking for a doubter. He brought his message of peace to people who were afraid. And he proved he had defeated death by showing his wounds.

The church has not changed much in two thousand years. It is still a place to gather with the other followers of Jesus – and we still gather in our doubts and our fears as often as we gather in confidence and triumph. Our evangelists do not want to win arguments and our Sunday School teachers do not know all the answers.

Of course, that is not really news. We live in a world of doubt and the believers have had their fears since the very beginning. But we do not hear this story about the first Easter often enough and when someone claims that doubt is not compatible with faith – then people might wonder if they belong in the group of believers. When someone says Jesus will prove he has defeated death by overwhelming evil and granting every blessing to his faithful people – some of us might wonder if we can have a relationship with God that is based on wounds and grief.

The apostles were gathered a week after Easter when Jesus came looking for his friends who might have their doubts – so that he could bring them the peace of God. Today is a week after Easter, and we are gathered. And some of us may have our doubts. What has happened in your life this past week that is hard to see as part of the Kingdom of God? A disappointment? Something a co-worker said? Sometime you did not do your best? Something that you might need to cover up with a show of confidence?

Your confidence is in a God who hears your doubts as a call to come to you. A God who will find you when you are afraid. A God who will prove he has defeated death by showing you his wounds. God does not limit his followers to those who have no doubts.

This life holds joy and promise and sadness and frustration. Since the beginning, the disciples have been people who had seen Jesus killed and responded by hiding away and locking the door.

There are times when you are surrounded by doubts. You remember the story. Jesus is alive. He has defeated death. Thomas knew the story, too. The other disciples had told Thomas that Jesus was alive just as we have been told. But we often stand with Thomas and say, "Unless I see the wounds – I will not believe." When you feel alone, and the death that you have seen with your own eyes seems more powerful than the promise of life that you have only heard about – wherever you are, gather with the believers on Sunday. That is where Jesus still comes looking for his friends. He has peace to bring to you. He has wounds to show you so you will know he understands your pain and the pain of the world you live in. He has faith for you that is deeper than any confidence you can generate on your own.

Jesus comes to you this morning and he will come to you for the rest of your life. You will see him more clearly at sometimes than others. You will be more confident at sometimes than others. Your life will have doubts. Your life will have wounds. That is why he is coming to you.

Do not make your relationship with God depend upon some self-generated grab for glory. Welcome him into your life where he finds you. He invites you to see his wounds and he offers you the peace of God.

God's people gather together. This is where your doubts are welcome and your wounds are embraced.