

2nd Sunday after Easter – John 20:19-31 & Acts 2:14-41

Grace and peace unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's so much going on today in the Scripture texts you all just heard. In particular, you heard one of St. Peter's first sermons, and a fine and short one at that. And the reading from John's gospel is just as rich and juicy. One of the most difficult tasks that a preacher has is deciding what text to preach on...and choosing which text to focus on today was exactly that...pretty difficult. So here's what we're going to be focusing on today; first we'll hear a little bit about the first part of the gospel reading, the part where Jesus breathes and gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples and gives them, and us, divine authority: to forgive sin or to retain sin, to release sinners from their bondage or with hold the promise from them. After that we'll focus on Thomas and unbelief. And that will be our chief focus will be, on Thomas, his unbelief, and what Christ does for him and for us; how Jesus Christ is the hero, our hero.

First, about the Holy Spirit and forgiveness. Alexander Pope, an English poet from late 17th Century and a strong Christian, wrote the following: “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” Forgiving is indeed something divine because only God has the power to completely and utterly forgive. And thanks be that God did indeed forgive us by sending his Son to take sin from us. This was the whole point for Peter's sermons we just heard a little while ago from Acts 2. So to forgive is a divine thing, and Jesus, the God-man, gives you all this same power: to forgive someone. As Jesus says, “Even as the Father has sent me so I send you...forgive.” So you all have this divine power and authority to forgive sin. And there's something else about this promise Jesus gives us: You can't be mad at me or anyone else to plans the liturgy and includes confession. And you can't be mad at me either if you hear a lot about forgiveness in my sermons! It is a divine thing to forgive, and you all are given that promise to give to others. It is a divine thing to forgive because when you do, the Holy Spirit is at work in your words to soften the hardest of hearts. Where there is sin, where there is no forgiveness, there is no Holy Spirit in you. When you are forgiven, either by my words or another Christian brother or sister, the Holy Spirit comes right back to you. To forgive is a most divine and blessed thing indeed.

Now onto Thomas. You all hear this same gospel reading year after year after year the Sunday after Easter. You hear about this doubting Thomas...when he wasn't even doubting but was unbelieving...he had lost his trust in Christ. So you have heard about this unbelieving Thomas year after year and I can guess what you might have heard. A little doubt is ok. There's nothing wrong with doubt. It's ok to doubt. Well brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm here to totally blow that out of the water. Christian faith, trusting in Jesus Christ isn't based on uncertainty, but on certainty. Christian faith is based on what God actually did in the midst of human history. Christian faith is based on a historical person who actually lived, who actually breathed the same air we breath, who actually died at the hands of sinners, and who as actually, factually, raised from the dead. This too was the focus of Peter's sermon in Acts 2.

So to say that, “well maybe this happened” or to say, “well, wouldn't it have been nice if this happened” or to say, “well isn't that a good story,” to say all of that is the same as saying, “God you're a liar.” The truthfulness of God is at stake here folks. Faith doesn't rest on uncertainty, faith rests on certainty. It has to. Saint Peter knew this quite well and says so at the end of Acts 2.

That's what I love about Thomas. He knows this. His faith, his trust in God has to be absolutely, totally, completely certain. There are no grey areas for him. Everything for him depends Remember what Thomas says about this supposedly risen Jesus: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Think about how the disciples must have felt...they saw the risen Jesus, their Hero, Thomas didn't. Even Mary saw

the risen Jesus, her Hero, but Thomas didn't. Were they angry with Thomas? We're not told, but I'm guessing probably not. Here's why. Thomas is still with them even after they all had seen Jesus! They didn't push him to the side or neglect him...they kept him in their midst, for even though Thomas didn't believe, they did. They knew for certain that Jesus was living and back from the grave, Thomas didn't. But they didn't forsake him in the least.

We then are told how Jesus Christ himself and in the flesh came to show himself to Thomas to make a believer out of him. And not only that but he commands Thomas to throw his fingers into his hands that were punctured by the nails, and commands him to throw his hand into the side where the spear lanced him. Not put, but throw...the language is very visceral and intrusive...our translation kind of masks that.

Thomas was very fortunate to see Jesus himself in person. Thomas was fortunate to see his Hero, wounds and all. But here is where Jesus puts Thomas in his place and lifts us up who haven't seen him. Jesus says to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Thomas was fortunate...Jesus didn't have to appear to him too. Thomas should have trusted his friends when they preached to him the truth, when they reminded him of God's Word and promise.

I don't know how many unbelieving Thomas' there are here gathered today...I hope not too many. And if you are one, then you're in the right place. But I do know that there a whole lot of unbelieving Thomas' in the world, many right here in Escanaba. What does this mean for us? If you are talking with someone who is not a believer, and they trust you, and they must trust you or you'll just come off as a salesmen or saleswomen, then you lay out the story. And Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is a good one to remember...much shorter than any of mine. Here it is again: *"Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with dees of power; wonders and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know---this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. **BUT** God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power...This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received form the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear...Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with **certainty** that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, know for certain that Jesus, whom you crucified God has made him both Lord and Messiah. Know for certain, without any shadow of a doubt, that what God the Father has done through Jesus is true, is certain, and is for you. Unlike Thomas, you won't get to touch Jesus' wounds and side this side of heaven, but like Thomas, Jesus is your Lord in whom you can have an absolute trust. For God was no liar when he inspired the writers of the Bible, and God is no liar when he forgives your sin.

I could go on and on, but let this suffice. "Jesus did many signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written...but what has been written was 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."

And Life in his name is this: A forgiven life. A life free from doubt or uncertainty. A life which trusts in the one true God. Did you think God was going to give you super powers? To make you a hero? No, God alone is our Hero, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But he did give you the power to forgive...a divine power indeed.