

Homily by Rev. Jim Goos

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen

In our Gospel Reading, the disciples are in a house with the doors locked “for fear of the Jews.” Early that morning they had heard the news from the women who had visited the tomb, that the tomb was empty, and the angel (or angels) had told them the good news that Jesus has been raised; He is not dead, but alive!!

If indeed, Jesus was alive, what did these disciples have to fear? Or, if Jesus was dead, as they seemed to believe, what protection would locked doors be? Jesus’ enemies had been able to have him arrested, tried, crucified and sealed in a tomb.

The disciples didn’t have any of this clearly sorted out. In spite of their doubts and fears, they still gathered together in the name of their Lord. To their wonder and amazement, Jesus fulfilled his promise, “where 2 or 3 gather in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).

Thomas was not with the other disciples. A number of scholars, including Martin Luther, have taught that Thomas earned and deserves the reputation as “Doubting Thomas.” They believe that it was no accident that Thomas wasn’t with the other disciples on the evening that Jesus rose from the grave.

And the reason was not that Thomas was busy with other obligations. Thomas chose not to be there. The most likely reason was that Thomas did not believe the women who reported that they Jesus had been raised from the grave.

But, according to Mark’s and Luke’s accounts of the resurrection, the other disciples didn’t believe the women either. That was not the only reason Thomas wasn’t there.

Thomas had seen Jesus arrested, beaten, and crucified. In his mind, it was over. Jesus, their leader was dead. Jesus had raised Lazarus, and a few others from the dead. If He couldn't save Himself, then who could raise Him?

Be that as it may, the other disciples were together in the room, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus "came and stood among them", saying "Peace be with you." After they had a few moments to recover from the shock of seeing Jesus, He added, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus came to them where they were, in their fears and doubts, in a locked room. That can give us hope in this time of Covid-19 and whatever feelings, doubts and fears we may be experiencing. Jesus knows where we are, what we are experiencing, and is with us and among us.

Jesus gave the disciples a task. It isn't spelled out in our Reading, but at the end of Matthew's Gospel their calling is to "go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit who would teach them, empower them and enable them to carry out that calling.

If Thomas was not with the disciples because he believed that Jesus was dead, and there was no point in meeting and worshipping together, then the disciples realized that to begin the task that Jesus gave them, they needed to start with Thomas.

Thomas was one of them. If they couldn't convince Thomas that Jesus had indeed been raised from the grave and had appeared to them, how could they hope to make disciples of people of other nations?

So they started with Thomas. His response is, “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.” The disciples didn’t convince Thomas that Jesus was alive, but they did manage to get him to join them when they met a week later.

Once again, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” But then he gently scolded Thomas for his lack of faith, “See my hands; touch my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas realized his mistake, let go of his doubts and came to real faith by proclaiming, “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas didn’t accept the testimony of the women, or of the other disciples; He needed to actually see Jesus before He believed. Jesus did not bless Thomas, but He did bless those who come to faith without seeing Jesus. Every one of us here today has received that blessing. And that is good.

At the same time, we all have the same call that the disciples had: to make disciples of all nations, baptized them and teach them. Each of us needs to take a serious look at how we are doing at testifying to the people around us that Jesus is alive.

Have we at least been able to bring our family and some friends to believe that Jesus is alive and gives life to those who believe? When people look at us can they see Jesus in us, and can they see evidence of the life that Jesus gives? Or do we look like everyone else?

These are serious questions and they deserve a serious answer. If we go out there into the world on our own strength and try to convince people that Jesus is alive and gives life, we will fail. No one will see Jesus in us; no one will believe our words.

The Holy Spirit is the One who gives us the words to say, the person we need to speak to, and the time and place, the where and when we speak. He gives power to our words, and He works in the heart of the person we speak to so that those words grow to become faith in Jesus.

We are not alone; Jesus and the Holy Spirit are with us. As we invite and allow Jesus and His Holy Spirit to live and rule in our heart and our life, He forgives our sin, and makes us a new creation, and transforms us to become more and more like Jesus.

As that happens, people will see Jesus in us, and they will see the new life that Jesus gives, and they will see us becoming a new creation, a new person. Some will want to experience that new life for themselves, and will want to become a new creation too. You and the Holy Spirit will be able to tell them and teach them what they need to know.

This isn't just your call, it's mine too. It takes all of us, not just a few. We are never too old. God can use us whoever we are and wherever we are. All that He needs is our willingness to follow and obey Him and allow Him to use us. Amen.