

“John: Believing and Doing”

John 20:19-31 • Jeremiah 29:4-14

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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Last week we celebrated Easter and it was a great celebration. But that first Easter was nothing like that. Think about the day the disciples had. Thursday night Jesus had been arrested and tried and on Friday he was crucified and was buried. For Jesus' followers it was a terrible tragedy. Then on Sunday morning the tomb was empty. They were confused and scared. Mary Magdalene comes and tells them that she had seen Jesus alive. That seemed hard to believe. Then two other followers show up and tell them how Jesus had talked to them on the road to Emmaus and so they rushed back to tell the others.

Now it's Sunday night and the whole church gets together, probably for dinner and Bible study. They're afraid the Jewish leaders may try to round them up and have them crucified also, so John tells us that the doors were locked. Even today in many areas of the world followers of Jesus must worship in secret for fear of persecution. In addition to fear there was probably also a feeling of guilt and shame. Peter had denied he even knew Jesus and most of the rest of them had simply abandoned Jesus when he was arrested. But then Jesus shows up. You know, it's when things seem the most hopeless in our lives that Jesus tends to show up as well.

John says that “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” He then shows them his hands and his side. John never adds any insignificant details. Everything he writes is important. As we look at this story, two things are important here. First, Jesus really is alive again. He has been raised from the death. And it wasn't just his spirit that was raised and visiting them. It was his body. He still had the holes in his hands and his side from the crucifixion. Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus asked for something to eat and he ate with them. The other thing that's important is that John emphasizes that the doors were locked. For years I wondered how Jesus got in.

While Jesus had his real human body, it was now his glorified resurrection body, his heavenly body. I used to think heaven was somewhere far away and that we are born, we live, we die, and then we go off to heaven. This passage has helped me come to believe that we live in the midst of heaven and we just can't see it. Jesus was able to come stand in their midst without having to enter through the door because he was now back in heaven but he was able to allow them to see him.

The theologian N.T. Wright says something very similar in his book, *Revelation for Everyone*. He says, “Heaven and earth, as I have often said, are not, in biblical theology, separated by a great gulf, as they are in much popular imagination. Heaven, God's sphere of reality, is right here, close beside us, intersecting with our ordinary reality. It is not so much like a door opening high up in the sky far away. It is more like a door opening right in front of us where there is an opening leading into a different world.”

In verse 24 John tells us that the Apostle Thomas was not with the others when Jesus came that evening. Keep in mind that this was not just the eleven apostles. This was the whole community of Jesus' followers. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there. Like I said, it had been a rough weekend. What we do know is that when the others told him they had seen Jesus, Thomas refused to believe it, which is what most people remember about Thomas. He's been called “doubting Thomas” ever since. You can't really blame him, though. It seems kind of unbelievable. He says that the only way he will believe is if he can touch Jesus' wounds himself. Here's the amazing thing. The next Sunday they are all gathered again. Notice that the Christians are already meeting together on Sundays. This time Thomas is with them and Jesus shows up again. Jesus seems to know what Thomas had said and tells him to “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

The Bible doesn't give any indication that Thomas actually touched Jesus' wounds. Instead, he immediately responds with the greatest declaration of faith anywhere in Scripture: "My Lord and my God!" That should be our reaction when we encounter the risen Christ in Scripture and in His church.

The last thing I want us to look at from this passage is in verse 21. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." This is John's version of the Great Commission. Jesus is clear that being his follower, his disciple, involves being sent to carry on his work in the world. But what does he mean when He says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." We need to answer two questions in order to see how it applies to our lives. We need to know *why* the Father sent Jesus, and then *how* Jesus was sent.

The gospels records three statements by Jesus about why He came. In Mark 10 Jesus says, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In other words, Jesus came to rescue. He came to rescue sinners like us. In Luke 19 Jesus makes it clearer when He says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." That was His mission. That's still the mission of God – to seek and to save the lost. If that's the mission of God then it's the mission of the church. Helping to seek and save the lost should be the highest priority of every believer. That's the *why*.

Now let's look at the *how*. How did Jesus go about seeking and saving the lost? In Matthew 11:19 Jesus says, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you. This is the key to knowing what he meant. Jesus' method of seeking and saving the lost was to enter into their world—our world—and build friendships. He spent time with people who were far away from God. You and I tend to avoid those kinds of people. Jesus went out of His way to spend time with them. And He calls

us to do the same thing. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

This was God's strategy all along. In our reading from Jeremiah 29, God tells the people who have just been sent into exile: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." On one hand their exile is a consequence of their disobedience. But on the other hand, it was part of God's plan to reach the people in the foreign land.

What does it look like for you to be sent? How does God want to use you to accomplish His mission? God has already placed people in your life that He wants to reach through you. Here's the exciting part. You don't have to fly half way around the world to go on this mission. These people are already involved in your life. And if they know you're a Christian, they are already watching you to see if this Christian faith is something they might be interested in. They're watching to see if it makes a difference in your life. They're noticing how you treat people and how you handle your money. Is it different from the world?

The first and most important thing for each of us, then, is to be intentional about living our faith. Michael Frost says we do that by living "questionable" lives. What he means is that the way you live your life should arouse curiosity in unbelievers so that they begin to ask questions about your faith.

The second thing you should do is begin to think like a missionary. Jesus was essentially a missionary to a foreign culture. John 1 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Or as the Message Bible has it, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." Missionaries who go into foreign countries first learn the language and the culture and then they move into the neighborhood. They look for ways to connect the Gospel with the culture.

You and I can do the same thing. Today, fewer than half of the people right here in our

area attend a church. In other areas of the country it's much lower. You are sent to this culture. Figure out who those people are in your life that God wants to reach through you. Make friends with them. Spend time with people you know who don't go to church. Find out what's important to them. And then look for ways to be Jesus to those people.

Let me leave you with four habits that you can develop that will help you in this mission, and you can remember them by the acronym BELL. First, find a way to *ble*ss someone outside the church. It might be something as simple as sending a handwritten note. Or a small gift. Or serving them in some way. This one habit will go a long way to helping you think like a missionary. Second, *eat* with someone who is

not involved in a church during the week. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." There's just something special about sharing a meal with someone. Third, *listen* to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This means spending time in prayer. The Holy Spirit will show you who those people are. Finally, *learn*. This means spending time in God's Word learning Christ. Spend time reading the Gospels to learn *about* Jesus and to learn *from* Jesus.

As you leave here today, think about what it means to be sent by God back into the world. He is sending *you* to be part of their lives so that *He* can be part of their lives. We are the sent people of God. So let's go.

Amen.