

Sermon for Quasimodogeniti Sunday – John 20:24-29

“²⁴Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” ²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed.””

Dear congregation, Easter is a time of joy! Jesus Christ has defeated the enemy of life. He has risen from the dead. He lives. The songs we sing are shaped by this message, and some Easter songs even makes us smile at the Easter message through their melodies. Take, for example, the song “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing” (LSB 475). Like a refrain, the “Hallelujah” repeats at the end of every verse. You sing, hear, and truly feel the laughter. It’s contagious. I don’t think that’s a coincidence. Michael Vulpis wants to carry us into the laughter of Easter with this melody. Paul Gerhardt, in the hymn “Awake My Heart, With Gladness” (LSB 467) invites us to share in the joy of Easter. See in the third verse: “This is a sight that gladdens.”

Easter is a time of joy! The question is whether our lives are continually permeated and shaped by it. Do we allow ourselves to be moved and renewed by the Easter message? Because even during Easter time, certain things weigh us down, burden our lives, rob us of courage and confidence, leave us feeling helpless, make us look to the future with worry, hold us captive, and cloud our vision.

Thomas, whom we hear about in today’s Gospel, experienced something very similar. Thomas is one of Jesus’ 12 disciples. One would think that he would know and trust in the Savior Jesus Christ, walking his path joyfully and with a spring in his step. He was able to hear firsthand what the Lord Jesus Christ said and witness how powerful He was in word and deed. Thomas spent three years with Him. And yet, at times, Thomas exuded a paralyzing aura and a suffocating sense of hopelessness.

In Judea, they had tried to stone Jesus. He escaped the stoning but now He wants to return. It’s understandable that the disciples want to hold the Christ back, but Jesus stands by His decision. Dejected and resigned, Thomas sums up the situation: “Let us go with Him so that we may die with Him.” Wow! Thomas is truly resigned. There’s nothing we can do. Powerless, he lets his arms hang limp. It’s coming to an end. The end. Pure resignation.

“Resignation” comes from the Latin word “resignare,” literally “to withdraw, to submit, to give up.” For us Christians, it means “to turn away, to withdraw from what has been given to us through baptism and faith in Jesus Christ.” I believe, dear congregation, that resignation is a great danger in the life of faith as well as in everyday life. It can be very contagious and spread to other people around us. It takes a great deal of strength to combat bitterness and resignation, withdrawal and giving up, whether this is in the Church, the congregation, or even in society.

So where do we get the strength necessary to combat this? Who and what makes us strong so that we Christians do not grow weary, withdraw, or even turn away from Christ? Thomas was drained by what was happening around him. The fact that Jesus was innocently condemned to death and died on the cross weighed heavily on Thomas and cut him to the heart. He was weary. His strength was utterly exhausted and his colleagues felt the same. What in the world was going to happen next? When Thomas stops by to see his colleagues again, they’re absolutely ecstatic, full of joy and confidence. Everyone is talking to him at once. Jesus is alive! If only you’d been there too. He was here! You really missed out. We’ve seen Jesus. He has risen from the dead. He spoke to us and gave us authority to act in His name. But Thomas, like

many others, waves them off. He isn't convinced. He remains skeptical, saying, "Unless I see the nail marks and put my finger into the marks and my hand into His side, I will not believe it."

Thomas wants to believe. But he can't. His doubts, weariness, and reservations are too great. Nevertheless, Thomas does something that we, too, should take to heart and use as an example. To verify whether it is true that Jesus lives, Thomas goes and stays with those whom the crucified and risen Lord has met. He doesn't go into the spring forest where everything is awakening to new life. One can certainly delight in that as well, but we are unlikely to encounter Christ there. Thomas goes and stays with the disciples of Jesus: in the congregation, in worship, where the Word of the risen Lord is preached and passed on, where people act in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thomas seeks and remains in the fellowship of those who gather in Jesus' name.

Dear congregation, it doesn't matter whether there are many of you, few of you, or whether you are my age. Jesus promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there I will be also." The thing that matters is that He is present. The days went by. They shared their worries and joys, talked, and went about their work. Then John reports, "²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" At this point, it is Sunday, a time for worship. The risen Lord is here. He greets those gathered with "peace be with you." Then He turns to Thomas and speaks to him personally. The others listen, serving as witnesses and companions. They fold their hands and pray. Just as directly and personally, the Lord Jesus can turn to you and speak to you today during worship. He can do this to each one of us.

Jesus knows our questions and doubts, our failings and strengths, our needs regarding work, children, health, the path of the Church, and everything. We can tell Him. He can handle it. For the truth (Jesus says of Himself, "I am the truth") has no need to fear doubt. The Lord Jesus reacts calmly to Thomas' doubts and generously to the conditions Thomas gives. Actually, one isn't supposed to set conditions for Jesus, that is, for God. "I will only believe you if you do this, that, or the other things." Theologically, as I once learned, this is impermissible. But even before Thomas utters a word, the Lord Jesus says, "Come very close to me. Look at me. You can touch me. You can experience me." John does not report whether Thomas actually touched Jesus with his hands, but the response has been handed down: "My Lord and my God!" The doubting, resigned, unbelieving man has become a believer through Christ, a saved person, gifted with eternal life. He becomes someone who not only considers the possibility of Jesus' resurrection, but who has encountered Christ, worships Him, and follows Him. Thomas is overwhelmed by Jesus Christ.

"Because you have seen me, Thomas, you believe," says Christ, and then adds, "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe!" Thomas wanted to touch and feel something first before believing. For us, the reverse is true. The risen Lord thinks about and looks upon those of us who are gathered here. He means you, too, when He says, "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe!"—Trust in me.

Such faith, after all, is no vague conjecture. Such faith is based on the witnesses who experienced the Lord Jesus Christ among whom Thomas is included. Through faith, we live in the presence of the crucified and risen Lord, from whom we draw strength and joy to cope with life's shortcomings and limitations, to resist injustice, to overcome fear, and to join the Easter jubilation. That is why Christians gather repeatedly on the first day of each week, on Sunday. We come with our sorrows and joys, and the Lord Jesus steps into our midst and turns towards you. And so, "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting." Amen.