

Life in His Name

Psalm 150

Acts 5:27-32

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

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.*

A life of believing in the name of Jesus, the Messiah, what kind of a life is that? And what does Messiah mean to modern day people? One web definition says Messiah is, "any expected deliverer". Well that just sets me up perfectly - should I go there? Should I call the pizza delivery guy a messiah? I think, maybe not. Because the *defining* idea behind 'Messiah' is the root word - the Messiah - in Greek, Hebrew, English, French, Latin - all a similar word - meaning anointed.

Now there the word becomes even more interesting - the root of anointed means to smear. So maybe that grease covered pizza delivery guy wasn't so off the mark! But wait! There really is more to the definition of anointed than to smear, in a religious context it means "to apply oil to as a sign of consecration or sanctification in a sacred rite." This makes the definition of the word Messiah closer to the understanding of an exceptional or hoped for liberator - in a spiritual sense. We already learned that the kind of Messiah that Jesus was, was a spiritual leader - not a political leader.

So a life in Jesus' name means that believing in Jesus, one is privy to a particular spiritual leadership. Living a life believing in Jesus means to have access to a place outside of our own experiences and knowledge. Just closing our eyes and placing ourselves in God's care - we have contact with an awareness that grants us a perspective *beyond* what we could know or have.

In our sermon text we have some evidence of the confusion as to what liberation Jesus offered. First of all, the disciples were gathered in fear of the Jews. They had heard about Jesus' resurrection, but they must have been skeptical, because they were hiding away still in fear. Now, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus came to the others, so his skepticism seems more pronounced than the others, bad rap, I say . . . but a great example of human tendencies. We all want proof ourselves.

It seems that most humans need to just learn certain lessons themselves. We like to see our lives as being unique and special, we feel like our strength lies in our personal combination of awareness and talents. And honestly, I think that if I were Thomas - there would be a bit of the pouty "feeling left out of the party" mentality - and maybe a touch of "sour grapes".

Thomas, when faced with the awareness that Jesus didn't reveal himself to him, still filled with the same fear the disciples were, closed up like a rock and became stubborn. So human! The walls go up - the defensiveness, the power hunger, "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." **You can almost hear him call them gullible! You can almost feel the disciples getting all riled up at the idea of Thomas calling them liars. That must have been one tense week for Thomas and his brothers and sisters in faith until he got to see Jesus himself.**

And Jesus doesn't really seem angry - he offered Thomas what he needed to believe, he offered Thomas equilibrium. But at the same time, Jesus knew he couldn't be there for each and every soul on earth - because he didn't want the faith for himself - he wanted his ideals, his life to be real in each and every heart.

The transformation of souls couldn't happen at the rate humanity needed if it all depended on his physical presence. Jesus needed the movement to be about a spiritual transformation that is real for each and every soul - not about a worshipping the Man-God Jesus movement. It wasn't about him - it is about us!

A life in Jesus name is a life focus on reconciliation, "23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Jesus empowered his followers. He gave them responsibilities. He didn't just leave it at, "Peace be with you" - no - he gave them tasks. A life in Jesus' name means he didn't come to this earth and suffer just for the individuals whose lives he touches - but each life is called to be peacemakers for others as well.

So the text we have today from John was all written, (according to his record) "so that [we] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name."

Frank L. Crouch, the Dean and Vice President of Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania wrote about this word "life" in this context here. He said that:

"in John, and throughout the New Testament, the English word "life" translates three different Greek words: psychē, bios, and zoē. When John (and the rest of the New Testament) speaks, on the one hand, of psychē or bios, these words refer to what one possesses simply by virtue of being a living creature. This is the life possessed from birth to death by animals and by humans, whether they be good or bad, righteous or wicked, founders of charities or perpetrators of genocide.

On the other hand, "life" as used at the end of this passage, is spoken of with the word zoē. This is eternal life (literally "life of the age"), life given to those who believe; life given to those who are born of God; life that, in John, *transforms us* from merely existing to living in the abundance and eternity of God. This life was present from the beginning and lies at the core of creation ("in him was life (zoē), and the life (zoē) was the light of all people" (1:4)). This life connects the deepest purposes of God with the ultimate purpose of John's gospel: "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah ... and that believing you may have life (zoē) in his name." This zoē does not replace psychē; we are still the same creatures we were before. It does, however, bring us into the fullness of grace; so that we are, also, not still, the same creatures we were before—at least potentially not the same.

This is the second Sunday of 6 Sundays in Eastertide, and as we travel through the church year we have the potential to be transformed. When we believe, we have access to God. And God, as we have seen in Jesus Christ, gives us hope, gives us inspiration, gives us forgiveness, gives us power to right wrongs - God's power in us is miraculous and amazing, and we are asked to believe without seeing the scars of Jesus' body but witnessing to the proof of Jesus' life. AMEN