



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Have you ever been to Scotland, anyone? Well, it is not on my bucket list, but I did read a story this week about a traveler who did go to Inverness, Scotland. While he was there, he met a native to the area who looked quite friendly and so he asked what he and his wife should see before they go home to the US. The man said simply, "Nessie! You have got to see Nessie before you go." Well, the traveler smiled with a twinkle in his eye that asked him if he really believed in the Loch Ness monster. Not sure if he was pulling the travelers leg or not but he proudly said, "Oh, yes. Of course, I believe in Nessie, We all Do!"

And isn't that just how life is for us today? People are always telling us things that seem so, shall we say, unlikely. We hear these all the time. The dentist says it won't hurt. The salesclerk that tells the red-haired shopper that she looks great in pink. Or the congregation member who tells this pastor that she would look good in a mini skirt and tank top. Yikes! NOT! How about the disciple that says He is Alive! And so, it goes with people who ask us to believe something incredible, simply because they say so. No wonder we find those things very hard to believe.

A little history lesson here. John's Gospel is written in a very different form from the synoptic Gospels. It was the last of the Gospels to be written. In fact, it is believed that by the time it was written all the witnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection had passed on. It was written then, for those who had not seen Jesus personally, but yet would come to believe by reading the accounts of those who had seen Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit that then breathed on them with faith.

But the disciples did not feel this breath of God that first night when they crept back into the upper room. Think about it. The room was probably dark but still had the aroma of the Passover lamb and herbs that were eaten with Jesus. Women were weeping in the corner or just sitting with their thoughts of what had happened. Even though these same women would in three days, bring the news that Jesus was alive, they were saddened by their loss. The men were cowering in fear of what would happen next.

It would have been the custom to round up the friends of the crucified and make examples of them as well. The Romans would surely find them, they were an efficient lot. In fact, the donkey was still outside the home. Not hard to put two and two together that it was the same man that lent the

disciples his upper room for their Passover meal. The disciples sat in silence listening to the sounds in the street below. Much commotion was still around after the crucifixion of their Lord.

In their hearts the 10 disciples felt abandonment, shame, and anger. They had followed Jesus for three years and now he was gone. They had loved him, so how could he do this to them? What would happen to them? How do they go on? And then they realized that two of their fold were missing. Judas and Thomas. What had happened to them? We know the whereabouts of only one of them from Scripture. But the disciples were not sure about Thomas. So, they wondered. They had so many thoughts, so many unanswered questions. The biggest one, is Jesus really gone forever?

Three days later when the women returned from the tomb, on the first day of the week, they told the disciples that Jesus was gone. He was not in the tomb. As they ran to see for themselves these disciples were exchanging their fear for confusion. Where did he go? Not having their questions answered they return to the upper room in the evening.

And then something, something spectacular happens. The one that they were all thinking about appears to them. "Shalom", he says. Which is Peace be with you. Jesus does not explain where he has been, just simply says, "Peace be with you". And then He breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." WOW. Just as God breathed into the man the breath of life in the beginning, Jesus breathes into the disciples the Spirit of Life, giving them new life. Jesus then commands them to go out among the people and forgive sins and tell them all what has happened. The good news is that Jesus will be with them as they go out. And just as quickly as He arrived, He left the disciples in the upper room.

John tells us that when Jesus left the upper room, Thomas arrived. They all had an opportunity to tell Thomas what they had experienced and what he missed. We do not know where Thomas had been, no explanation there. But we do know that Thomas doubted his friends. Maybe he was confused with them all talking at once. He did not, could not believe what they were telling him. After all, everyone in Scotland believes in Nessie! Right?

I do not think that Thomas did not believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, but he just could not believe that Jesus had come to them while he was missing. Thomas was not a bad man. He just had a different route to faith. In fact, remember that he was one of the first to declare his faith in this rabbi, Jesus that they were following. But he just could not believe in something he had not seen with his own eyes. I suspect that he wished he could have been there. He wished he could have seen Jesus. I think that out of frustration, he declares that "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." Thomas simply wanted what the other 10 disciples and the women had, to see Jesus and have the Spirit of God breathed on him too!

And now fast forward a week. Many of the disciples were still hiding in the upper room. And we don't know exactly how many went out into the streets to do the work of Jesus, or how many were still hovering in fear, but this evening's encounter has Thomas among the group. And again, Jesus simply appeared among them. "Peace be with you!" was his greeting. Jesus confronts Thomas and tells him to put his finger on his scars on his hands and his hand into his side where the spear had pierced Him. Thomas is now convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead and responds with "My Lord and my God."

Jesus then remarks that Thomas needed to see Jesus alive to believe, and to bless those who believed without seeing him alive. What a scene that was. In fact, most scholars believe that that was the last word in John's Gospel. The Purpose of the book was written to clear up any oversights, any questions readers might have? Nessie questions?

I have always believed that Thomas got a bad rap for his wanted to see the proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. Being a visual person myself, I can surely understand. And in fact, I think that Thomas is very much like the rest of us. He had doubts. We have doubts. Sometimes it is hard to believe that everyone in that upper room believed right away when they saw Jesus. Thomas' story is that of an honest man. He could not proclaim to others what he still had questions about. He wanted to be sure because he loved the Lord so much. He needed to be sure of what was true. Just because he wished Jesus was alive, did not make it so. He needed proof.

And here is the Good News in this story. God doesn't mind. He would rather we be honest about our doubts than pretend we don't have them. He wants our minds and hearts to be on the same page. Wrestling with our faith, will make our faith stronger. Remember that we need the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit of God that Jesus breathed on the disciples to work within us.

Maybe we need to be more like Thomas, doubting Gwen, doubting Alishia, doubting Jamar? Maybe just maybe we need to ask the dentist exactly how much it will hurt and why he thinks it will be minimal. Or why the folks in Scotland believe that the Loch Ness monster is not just a fairy tale. But for this morning, we are in the right place if we do have doubts like Thomas. It is true that many people with honest doubt, struggle to believe. They look for hard answers to the hard questions. But they must look in the right places with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Being in community, listening to Scripture being read, with the Holy Spirit present, is exactly where you should be.

I truly believe that Thomas did what he believed and questioned or challenged God. He wanted proof. He wanted Jesus to prove he was alive again. And this is the punch line folks. God did not deny Thomas, but rather loved him so much, he left the other sheep and went back searching for the one lost sheep. God held a party when the woman's one lost coin was found. God will come to find you too in all our doubts. He will show you and me what it was like for Jesus to die and to live again. Wrestling with God might not give us a limp, but we know we will be breathed on by the Spirit of God. And God's peace will come to you through faith.

This was written down 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.

And now may the peace, God's peace, that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.

Christ has Risen.....He is Risen indeed!
Alleluia!