

## **Resurrection Faith**

### **First in a Series of Six Sermons**

**April 15 and 16, 2023**

**Second Sunday of Easter Acts 5:29-42, I Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-21**

**Resurrection Faith / Resurrection Conversations / Resurrection Abundance / Resurrection Promises / Resurrection Response**

**John 20 - Then Jesus 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. Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

### **Dear Friends in Christ**

Five years ago or so, I was visiting one of our members in our local nursing home. Her name was and still is Judy. I knew Judy well. She wasn't yet 70 years old. She had a great sense of humor. Very independent and a bit on the feisty side of life. She was going through all kinds of health troubles and frustrations. Unable to walk. Restricted from doing the simplest tasks in life. And when I asked her how I could be helpful, she looked me in the eyes, and said, “Just shoot me, Pastor Griffin.”

Which reminds me of Lyle, my next door neighbor in our small town. His friends called him Hammer. He had been a mechanic at a local implement dealer, divorced, a heavy drinker in his day. He could talk smart with the best of them. He was in his last weeks in a struggle with cancer, and as I did a little chit chat with him before I gave him the Lord's Supper, I asked him if there was anything I could do for him - he also looked me in the eyes and said, “yes, you can take me out back and shoot me.” To which I replied, “You know, Lyle, that wouldn't really be very good for my career.” He responded, “I suppose you're right.”

Both Lyle and Judy were strong believers in Jesus Christ. And yet even the strongest of believers have their “doubting Thomas” days, right? Days when the encouragement of our friends doesn't quite cut it. Days when we try but can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. Days when the trials and the tests and the challenges of life have a way of crowding out our desire to remain cheerful and positive. Days when it seems as though the forces of darkness have prevailed.

The really good news of Easter, of course, is that the forces of darkness have not prevailed. Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world, is risen. And because He is risen from the dead, we may be certain that He is who he said he was. We may be certain that all of his teachings are true. We may be certain that the Father has accepted the Son's sacrifice as payment in full for the sins of the world. We may be certain that Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father and that he is ruling all of heaven and earth with authority.

Our Easter sermon series theme is ***“Raised With Christ.”*** Our theme verse for this Easter sermon series comes from Colossians 3, ***If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.***

Throughout this series, we will be exploring what it means for the Easter Gospel to permeate and change our thoughts, words, deeds, and habits. Next weekend, our sermon theme is “Resurrection Conversations.” The weekend after that - “Resurrection Abundance.” Three weekends from now - “Resurrection Promises.” And four weekends from now - “Resurrection Response.”

Today our theme is “Resurrection Faith.” As we explore the account of Jesus appearing to His disciples on that first and then second Sunday evenings of Easter and patiently inviting Thomas to believe, we would learn two truths about what it means to have a strong and growing and vibrant resurrection faith. 1) It rejoices in our Lord's patience. 2) It trusts in God's plan.

## **Resurrection faith rejoices in our Lord's patience.**

A story is told about a man named Frank, who wasn't known for his patience. And he had absolutely no use for negative conversation. One day, he got a call from his wife during a busy day at work. She was talking slowly and wasn't at all upbeat. She seemed to be beating around the bush. Finally, he lost patience with her. He interrupted her and demanded that she be brief and positive. She paused for a moment and then cheerfully replied, "I discovered the airbags in our new BMW work great!"

The God we believe in is famous for His patience.

Listen to what Peter had to say to the early and suffering Christians about the purpose of God's patience.

***8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

It took God 430 years to fulfill His promise to Israel that He would deliver them out of slavery to their Egyptian taskmasters. It took God 40 years before He led them out of the wilderness into the Promised Land. Then there was the Babylonian captivity and the Assyrian captivity, just to mention two of the most famous. Whatever it took for the people of God to reach repentance.

God's love is patient and kind. It does not keep a record of wrongs. It does not wish that any should perish. Notice how patient Jesus was with early disciples. How willing He was to appear to various groups of first century believers and help them to overcome their uncertainties. Already on the first day, Peter and John had seen with their own eyes the empty tomb. Already Mary Magdalene saw Jesus with her own eyes, heard Him say her name with her own ears, and embraced Him with her own arms. Luke records that Jesus had appeared to Simon that first day. Also that He walked along the road to Emmaus with two disciples, and revealed Himself to them in the breaking of the bread.

Resurrection faith rejoices in the presence and patience of Jesus. That evening, the disciples saw with their own eyes the wounds, the scars, and the bruises of their crucified but now risen Master. They heard with their own ears that their sins were forgiven. The peace of Almighty God was delivered into their very hearts, souls and minds. They felt upon their own faces the breath of their Savior. They were commissioned to forgive the sins of the penitent and to withhold forgiveness from the impenitent to the far corners of the world. If they slept that night, and that's a big if - they fell asleep with believing hearts. Their resurrection faith was alive and well.

For whatever reason, Thomas was missing that night. And when his close friends told them what had happened, he would not believe it. Not unless he himself could see and touch for himself. A week of persuasion wasn't enough. It took Jesus Himself to convince Thomas. No doubt Thomas wanted to believe, but he just couldn't quite get it done by himself.

Which should not surprise us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that ***no man can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*** And to the Romans, ***“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”*** When Thomas did believe and

confessed that Jesus was His Lord and His God, Jesus responded, “***Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***”

Dear friends in Christ, this morning I invite you first of all to rejoice in the simple truth that God’s love is patient and kind. It does not keep a record of wrongs. God’s love for us has the big picture in mind. According to His omniscience, He not only knows the mistakes we have already made. He knows the ones we will be making in the days ahead. But it is not according to His omniscience that Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of His Father and is ruling heaven and earth. It is according to His grace. Which brings us to our second truth about resurrection faith.

## **Resurrection faith trusts in God’s plan.**

In today’s Epistle lesson, Peter writes about God’s plan in terms of the desired and end result. “***In this, you rejoice, though now, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ....obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***”

In today’s first lesson, a Pharisee named Galaliel understood that if the apostles were carrying out a mere human undertaking, it would fail. But if the plan was of God, it would be futile to oppose it.

God’s plan, of course, was to send His only and beloved Son into this world, not to condemn it, but to save it. Our Lord’s plan was to spend three years teaching and preaching God’s Word and performing signs and wonders that would validate that Word. It was to train a small group of unimpressive and uneducated men who would carry on his work after he had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. It was to do the will of his father in every way, including setting his face towards Jerusalem, and refusing to be distracted until he had suffered all that he was appointed to suffer, and according to the plan, he was crucified, dead, and buried.

Resurrection faith trusts that God’s plans are perfect and without error. That with him a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. That His one great desire is that repentance and faith be preached to the ends of the earth.

In the case of Thomas and the other disciples, the plan of God was for them to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and for them to turn their first century world upside down. As we sit here today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. 2.2 billion people claim to follow Jesus as Savior, which is 31% of the world population. To quote Gamaliel one more time, “If the plan is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it.”

Resurrection faith trusts that God’s plans are perfect and without error. Paul said it this way to the Romans - that God is working all things out for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purposes.” James went a step further when he invited us to “count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The faith of Thomas was perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, in that moment when he saw, and he believed, and he cried out, “My Lord and My God.”

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

- On their bad days, they are having a hard time believing that God is blessing them in the midst of so much heartache.
- On their good days, they are so grateful to God for prayers that have been answered.
- On their really good days, they really don’t understand what God is up to, but what they do know and rest in is the simple truth that Christ is risen, He is ascended into heaven, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling all of heaven and earth with authority.
- On every one of their days, they are the forgiven and redeemed children of God, precious in His sight. In Jesus’ Name. Amen