

Just Enough Miracles

John 20: 19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Last week, we celebrated here something that was truly a miracle. Someone who had died on the cross, was resurrected to life. He was really dead, and he was raised to real life. It was a miracle. It doesn't happen every day or every season.

But we know from our reading of the Bible that Jesus was not the first person to come back to life. Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the grave. Matthew tells us that when Jesus died on Calvary: "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

So what was the big deal about Jesus' resurrection? For one thing, he not only was raised to life, but he remained alive. In contrast with the others, who were raised from the dead, they died again.

But not Jesus. He stayed risen from the dead. He continues to live and reign for all eternity. It was a miracle beyond belief, and it was a miracle that created belief.

Jesus appeared to his disciples on the night of Easter, and many who had trouble putting it all together, finally did just that when Jesus himself appeared with his resurrected body. While that was enough for those who were there, it was not enough for the absent. It's been true in the Christian church ever since -- the Spirit of God is more successful in creating and sustaining faith when people gather together. Wherever two or three gather together in God's name, he is there right in the middle of them, and the Spirit is present with his free and generous gifts. Thomas, who was absent on Easter night, missed out on a chance to strengthen a weak and wandering faith.

This account points out what the Christian church has been proclaiming for centuries: if you want to believe in Jesus, then you should meet Him. If you want your weak faith to be strengthened, then meet with Him. Where will you find him? Before he ascended into heaven, the disciples met him in the locked room, feeling afraid and guilty. Others later would meet Jesus on their streets and in their homes. His appearances were powerful and persuasive, and many came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord because they met him personally and came to believe that he had suffered, died, and risen from the dead to redeem them from their sins, and to enable them to have eternal life.

Today, we still meet Jesus, but we meet him in His Word and in His Sacraments. We hear him speak both warning and comfort, and we sense him stirring our hearts when the waters of baptism are applied, or the Lord's Supper is shared. We, like Thomas, are physically removed from Jesus, yet we still want to be able to meet him convincingly and personally. Thomas did not go looking for Jesus. Instead, he went to the place where he knew Jesus would be, in the gathering of the believers, and

Jesus found him. Jesus kept looking for the lost and the weak at the same time that he cared for the believers who were strong and confident and mature.

Today, with our drive through surgery centers, we see the modern medical miracles of people who undergo extraordinarily complicated surgery on a Monday and are home and walking around the block on Thursday. We make jokes about people who want to show us their surgery scar. Thomas wanted more than that. He wanted to see the nail prints in Jesus hands. That was gruesome enough. But he wanted to go MUCH farther. He wanted to put his hand into the side of Jesus where he was speared. This was much more than "show me your scar." Isn't it amazing that Jesus showed up that night, knowing what Thomas was expecting!

Jesus appeared to the quivering people in the locked room. He did not have to use the door, and he didn't. He was NOT there one minute, and the next minute he WAS. It was awesome, and perhaps a bit scary. His first words would be REALLY important. They were "Peace to you." Can you imagine what would have happened if Jesus had first said "BOO!" No, Jesus didn't frighten his friends. He showed them, with his words, and actions, that there was peace between human beings and the living Lord. They were forgiven and at peace with God.

At the end of this account, John records: *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*

There are many miracles done by Jesus recorded in John's book. Whenever Jesus performed a miracle, he always clearly demonstrated his godly powers, he helped people in their daily or urgent need, and created or strengthened the faith of the participants or the observers.

There were many other miracles, but we don't need any more. I'm quite convinced that if there were a hundred more miracles recorded, or a thousand more miracles, it wouldn't make a difference. I think we have just enough miracles to convince us that Jesus is the Son of God, that he has died for our sins, and that the greatest miracle of all, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, proves that

1. we have a living Lord who reigns over heaven and earth for the benefit of his kingdom and his people

and

2. all believers will be raised from the dead, and live with him in heaven forever.

Our mission at Zion is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that others can share in his peace and power. Our Easter celebration is not limited to one Easter Sunday. We celebrate Easter every Sunday, where we praise God and celebrate Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, who promised: "Because I live, you will live, also." Amen.

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