John 20:31 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.

I am sure that as you heard the words of our gospel reading your realized the tremendous information that is given in the words. It is not just information on the now living Jesus but so much more. Insight into the disciples and their faith. Insight into the beginning of the Holy Christian church. Insight into the whole purpose of what the Church will be. Now normally I would not want to cover and consider all that is said here, but ultimately felt that on this day of worship a consideration of everything would be of benefit for us. Our theme will be: **WHY HE LIVES!**

Now, to begin you will have to forgive me for this question. On the morning of Resurrection, do you remember what the angels and even Jesus himself said to the women? No, not the fact that Jesus was alive and not among the dead because as they saw him that truth became evident. Both Matthew and Mark affirm the words and the command given. The women are told, **“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”** In other words the disciples should not have been in that locked room. The disciples already by all the reports given in the morning should have been on their way, if not already in Galilee. And what is most telling about these words is that they also indicate that even before his death, as Jesus spoke to the disciples of his resurrection He told them beforehand that it was to Galilee that they should go.

But here they are in Jerusalem behind locked doors. I point this out because all too often we get all over the case of Thomas for his lack of belief but in truth all the disciples are really in the same boat. None of them believed when Jesus said he would rise from the dead! None of them believed the report of the women that they had seen angels and Jesus himself with instructions to head to Galilee. And just before this appearance of Jesus we are told of how Jesus appeared to two of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. People, Emmaus is to the west of Jerusalem and not anywhere near the straight north roads that would lead to Galilee. In other words, even with the clear teaching of Jesus, the appearance of angels and the report of the women that they had seen Jesus, the disciples in abject doubt are holed up in some house totally ignoring what had been told them!

Well, welcome to the plight of almost all of us. We have before us the beauty and majesty of our Lord and Savior, our Risen Lord and Savior through His holy and inspired Word and yet we too so often fail to hear and obey the clear directions and commands of Jesus. Jesus says, “Worship and keep the rest day holy!” (And yes, I am even including electronically doing this because of the times!) But we decide we have better things to do than spend time with Jesus and his Word. It is just a reminder that yep, we are just like those disciples and if it weren’t for the grace and wonder of Jesus, all of us, would most certainly be lost because of our own foolishness and failure to listen and believe.

But oh, the marvel and grace of Jesus. The disciples are gathered, hiding in a locked room, filled with fear and doubts about all that had been reported and told them. I would imagine the ladies who saw Jesus and interacted with him are pretty fed up with the foolishness and stubbornness of these men who just won’t believe that Jesus is alive. Now understand, while they are gathered, here comes the two guys from Emmaus, to give them a complete report on what they had seen and been told. It is while they are discussing these things that Jesus simply appears among them.

That’s right. As Jesus simply disappeared before the Emmaus guys, now Jesus simply appears to the disciples in this locked house. Remember, Jesus has taken up the full use of his heavenly power and glory. He appears in this house and he says, **“Peace be with you!”** And note what the text says, **“he showed them his hands and feet.”** I completely marvel at this. The wounds from the nails are clearly visible but what causes me the most marvel is that the wounds from the beating and the crown of thorns and the wounds from the whippings that would have torn his flesh were gone! Jesus in his state of exaltation leaves only those wounds that will most clearly identify him. Now I don’t know if like Thomas they needed to poke at those wounds, but I will tell you that as what they saw sank in, they hugged, they grasped, they touched and interacted with Jesus in a very physical and emotional way. I think you would too!

Once they settled down and the reality of what was happening sank in, it is then that Jesus gives them some directions. Again, please understand. I believe that Jesus spent hours with his disciples on this night. I believe Jesus taught lots of things and reminded them of the things He had taught them. As a part of that conversation and teaching going on, John, inspired to write by the Holy Spirit is directed to share these specific words of Jesus as of utmost importance. The text says, **“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

Here is clearly the call for the spread of the message of Jesus. Jesus tells them their job is to go, to go into the world and share the wonder and joy of what Jesus has done. All of this would be accomplished, not by the men themselves, but rather by the Holy Spirit who Jesus has just breathed upon them. Mark that event. With that breathing on them, with that giving of the Holy Spirit to them, an extra measure of the Holy Spirit, is given them. They will be different from this point. They will believe clearly and truly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who has come to atone for the sins of the world, their sins and all of ours. Although we aren’t told this, I believe that for the next week, these disciples are out and about telling people that Jesus lives! Perhaps for this week, going to those who had been closest to Jesus, who had previously believed in Jesus but were now despairing because of the crucifixion of Jesus. I just can’t believe that these disciples stay in hiding for the whole next week but that they hear and do what Jesus says namely, to go out and proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior!

What else does Jesus tell them? Here is the truth of Jesus is the simplest of ways, **“Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** It is ministry. It is the message of life and salvation. But do grasp it is a message of faith. Faith in Jesus as the one who atones. Faith in Jesus as the one who lives and reigns. Faith in Jesus as the heart and core of what the Christian faith is to be. Because they don’t forgive or refuse to forgive on the basis of their own ideas, but rather will do this based on what Jesus has taught and clearly shown them. In other words, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** That is John 3:16. But please know what John 3:17-18 says. **“For God did not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”**

Those words are also the words of Jesus. Clearly forgiveness and eternal life are not about the works we do or that we ourselves are going to be perfect and holy. We are to have faith. To believe that in Jesus and because of Jesus forgiveness and life are ours. But should we reject Jesus and decide it is about us and not him, we are going to have a problem. Verse 19 of John 3 says, **“This is the basis for the judgment: The light has come into the world, yet people loved the darkness rather than the light…”** To believe in Jesus is a matter of complete trust in Him and his sure atonement. That He lives, He is God’s Son and that just because we believe we have forgiveness and life. And though we may sin and disobey our Savior, faith always leads us to repent, to be sorry, to work at stopping the sin and once again trust that Jesus forgives. These words are the basis of the ministry of the Lord Jesus and these facts and truths have never changed. Make sure your church is teaching Jesus and salvation by faith in Jesus.

As the Lord has shown grace and love to the disciples gathered the first night, so a week later Jesus will show grace and mercy to the one we call “Doubting Thomas.” Personally, I would call him “Unbelieving Thomas.” He has before him at least 10 of his fellow disciples, maybe even more as the women share too, who clearly testify and declare that they have seen and been in the living presence of the Lord Jesus. But Thomas refuses to believe. And yes, we all know the bold and stubborn statement he makes. Honestly, I think it took his fellow disciples a week to even get him to gather with them for fellowship and learning. And that’s when Jesus appears again to them as a whole group.

Please note that clearly Jesus came to see Thomas. He appears with the normal greeting, **“Peace be with you,”** and then we are told he directly turns to Thomas. **“Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it in my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.”** Honestly, the grace and mercy of Jesus just stands out here. Jesus directly confronts the problem Thomas was having. The problem was the stubborn foolishness of the human to resist the issues of faith and trust in the Holy and Mighty God. After all the miracles Thomas had seen and after all that Jesus has taught and told them would be, Thomas would not, yes, resisted the truth and wonder of Jesus so that he did not believe the truth of what was! But Jesus in grace and mercy will change that.

Picture it. The disciples together. Thomas is there now, still arguing that he was not going to believe. All of a sudden there is Jesus. The greeting is given and then Jesus turns right to Thomas with his challenging words. I don’t think Thomas did any poking or jabbing at the moment. I think Thomas fell right to his knees, grabbed onto Jesus and simply and clearly declared: **“My Lord and my God!”** Doubt and unbelief are cast away in Jesus. Thomas’ proud human resistance to the wonder and marvel of Jesus in one fell swoop is crushed and belief floods in. No more needs to be said.

No more needs to be said because the confession of Thomas is clear: **“My Lord and my God.”** Without a doubt now, Thomas grasps Jesus as Lord, a name that speaks to the loving, compassionate, and eternal being who is above all and beyond all, filled with grace and forgiveness. But even more! Thomas proclaims Jesus “God.” The almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere, supreme and eternal being before whom every knee should bow and every tongue confess as God in total fear and terror. There is no being above and beyond God. Oh, yes, Thomas’ confession is clear.

I will tell you it is with humble and grateful heart that I hear and contemplate Jesus’ next words because clearly those next words are really about us. Jesus says, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** That’s clearly the issue of faith each and every one of us has to come to grips with. In the book of Hebrews the author clearly caught the impact and truth of these words when he says, **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see.”** That’s where faith is at for all of us.

Again, understand. For the next 40 days Jesus is going to make appearance after appearance to help people grasp that He is alive. Jesus does this to clearly establish by the testimony of eye witnesses the truth of his being alive. The Lord’s Holy Spirit, in inspiring the words of His New Testament does not see fit to tell us of all of these appearances but really of only a few, by my count about 8. And yet you and I need to grasp that at Pentecost some 3,000 people would declare faith in Jesus and be baptized. 3,000, not only because of the appearance of the Holy Spirit but because as the disciples are declaring Jesus Lord and Savior through the resurrection, there were a whole bunch of people there saying, “Yep, I saw him!” The testimony of hundreds as to the living Jesus brought thousands to faith!

Then the words I highlighted today: **“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.”**

That is the purpose of the message of Jesus. It is not a message of power and control nor a message of “stick the authorities.” It is a message of eternal life and salvation. It is a message of forgiveness and being granted eternal life because of Jesus. Not you. Not about your works and good deeds but about faith. You believe Jesus is, as Thomas said, **“My Lord and my God!”** And when that fact is in your heart that fact is seen in your life of light in Jesus. Thank you Lord for this victory. Thank you Lord for calling us and granting us life in you! Amen.