My Lord and My God

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John 20:19-31

When 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.' [20]After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [21]Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'[22]When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. [23]If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. [25]So 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.' 26 A 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.' [27]Then 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.' [28]Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' [29]Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. [31]But 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.

1. Is the Resurrection Possible?

There are many things that Christians believe. Let me give you a few examples: God created the world; God so loved the world that he has given us his son Jesus; Jesus was born from a virgin Mary; God became a human being; Jesus is risen from the dead; the Holy Spirit was poured out to human kind; Jesus will come again; God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one God. What do you think is the most important message in Church? I am asking you the truth that the church of Jesus Christ is founded. If you choose one message that you want to share with non-believers, what would like to choose? For me, Jesus is risen from the dead. This is the message that Jesus' disciples preached until they died. But the resurrection of Jesus is not easy to explain. It is a mystery.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But this concept is difficult for non-Christians to understand. It's illogical and seems impossible. When the disciples learned that Jesus had risen from the dead, they did not believe it until Jesus appeared to them. In our passage today, we hear about

the story of Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples who didn't believe that Jesus had risen until he met Jesus face to face.

2. Jesus Appeared to His Disciples

On the evening of the first Sunday after Jesus has been raised, his disciples met in secret behind locked doors near Jerusalem. The disciples were afraid that they would be put to jail for being followers of Jesus.

Suddenly Jesus passes through the door and stands among them. He says, "***Peace be with you***." Although his words are the conventional greeting similar to "shalom" in Hebrew, the greeting has a deeper meaning. The peace Jesus is referring to can be experienced when we have the right relationship with the Lord. John 14:27 says, "***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid***." When Jesus visits his disciples, he says don't worry or be afraid of anything.

When Jesus visited his disciples, he shows his hands and side to them and they become overjoyed. The disciples' fear has disappeared. Jesus then recommissions them as his apostles. They are sent to preach, teach, and do miraculous signs. The disciples need the power of the Holy Spirit to do these things, and Jesus says, "***Receive the Holy Spirit***." The disciples received the Holy Spirit after fifty days on the day of Pentecost. Jesus also talks about the forgiveness of sins which is the essence of the New Covenant.

One of the disciples, Thomas, is not there when Jesus appears to the disciples. We do not know where he was. When the other disciples tell Thomas that they have seen the risen Christ, he does not believe them. Thomas says, "***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***" (20:25). The witnesses of the disciples did not convince Thomas.

A week later, Jesus miraculously enters the locked room again and says "***Peace be with you***." Jesus then asks Thomas, "***Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe***" (20:27). We are not sure whether Thomas actually touches Jesus or not, but he says to Jesus, "***My Lord and my God***!"

3. My Lord and My God

What does "my Lord and my God" mean? Literally it means that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. Thomas confirms what John 1:14 says, "***The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.***" Before Jesus came into the world, people in general only experienced a partial understanding of God. But after Jesus, God becomes fully visible and tangible through Jesus. "My Lord and my God" talks about the identity of Jesus. In his statement, Thomas now becomes convinced who Jesus is.

I believe that the confession we see here of Thomas, “My Lord and my God” also has a deeper meaning. When Jesus appears to his disciples a second time, a week later, we do not know what happened during the week. We imagine though that Thomas would have been thinking about the testimony of the disciples. Yet he might have thought about leaving the group because he can’t believe the resurrection of Jesus. Without seeing Jesus, how could Thomas be a witness for Jesus?

That’s why Jesus comes back to show himself to Thomas. He tells Thomas to feel his wounds. In that interaction, Thomas is touched at knowing that even though Jesus wasn’t physically there, Jesus already knew what Thomas was thinking. Thomas experiences the amazing love of God through his interaction with Jesus. “My Lord and my God” is not simply a confession of his belief about the identity of Jesus, but is a confession of Thomas’ love and commitment to the Lord. When he meets Jesus, he has decided to dedicate his life to Christ.

Church tradition and history tell us that Thomas traveled outside of the Roman Empire as a missionary, possibly as far away as India to preach the gospel. According to tradition, Thomas reached Muziris, India in 50 AD and baptized several believers. Thomas is possibly the first disciple to bring the gospel to the Far East. This might explain why he is considered the Patron Saint of India. Church tradition also says that while he was establishing a church there, Thomas was stabbed with a spear, dying from the wound.

4. Four Steps of Faith

When I reflected on the life of Thomas, I was reminded of the four stages of faith that each of us go through. I would like to call people in these stages explorers, followers, disciples, and apostles. In Jesus’ ministry, we see lots of people who are simply curious about him. Luke 12:1 says, “***Thousands of people crowded around Jesus and were stepping on each other***” (CEV). They don’t necessarily believe in his message but might be interested in what he teaches and what he can do. These people are just interested in seeing Jesus.

The second stage of faith are followers. This is the stage when people seek learning, listening to the gospel, and healing from Jesus. Matthew 4:23 & 24 say, “***Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.*** [24]***So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them***.” These people follow Jesus to meet their personal needs.

The third stage is disciples. In this stage, these people have a sense of call and learn what Jesus wants them to do. Jesus’ disciples are in this stage

until Jesus was risen from the dead. The last stage is apostles. This is where the mission is clear for his disciples. The lives of these disciples are to spread the gospel and the people are less focused on what Jesus can do for them but of having a proactive, personal ministry.

Those who are in the stages of explorers and followers focus on individuals' needs and Jesus is considered as the one who meets our physical, intelectural, and spiritual needs. However, those who are in the third and fourth stages focus on what the Lord wants and we are considered as the one who would fulfill God's dreams.

Regardless of our current stage of faith, we need to know what stage we are in and try to go to the next stage. I hope all of us upgrade our stage of faith as Thomas becomes an apostle from being a disciple of Jesus.

5. Conclusion

Is Jesus your and my Lord and God? Every Christian might say that Jesus is their Lord or God. But not everyone may have the same understanding of what that statement means. Thomas was a disciple of Jesus, but had doubts about the resurrection of Christ. But after Jesus appeared to him, his life was forever changed. Thomas wasn't centered around himself anymore, but devoted his entire life to preaching the good news of the resurrection of Jesus.

6. Application

Everyone experiences doubts about the faith at times. Is doubting bad? Should we never doubt about our faith? Think about Jesus. He did not say "Here I come!" but rather he shouted on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Jesus felt he was abandoned by God. Jesus doubted God's presence with him. But God neither abandoned Jesus nor us. I like what Pope Francis said, "doubts can be "a sign that we want to know God better and more deeply." Jesus says, "***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***" (John 20:29). This does not mean we should not doubt. Rather it says that those who trust the Lord in any cases, God will be grateful.

A woman was in a coma in the hospital and her doctor told the family she would have less than 24 hours to live. When the pastor visited the family, they asked the pastor to pray for her healing. The pastor mentioned that he wasn't sure if she would recover, but he prayed for her anyway. Next day she was out of comma and a few days later, she was discharged from the hospital and went back home. This is a story that I experienced during my time as a pastor in Missouri. It's hard to believe that something like this can happen! Our life is full of miracles and mystery. We experience always the love and grace of the Lord.

Although we may not see Jesus in person, whenever we have our doubts, we can ask Jesus to reveal himself to us. Jesus will appear to us and transform our perspective and understanding. Then people in the world will see the risen Christ in our lives. Amen.