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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Real and True and For You”

Text: John 20:19-31; Revelation 1:4-18; Acts 5:12-32

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] **Alleluia!**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Thus spoke Thomas. *Doubting* Thomas, if you like. Which is a name a bit unfair, really. They all were doubters that day. Unbelievers, if you like. The women who went to the tomb expecting a dead body. The other disciples in that room cowering in fear behind locked doors and barred windows. The two disciples walking in despair on the road to Emmaus. Jesus had told them all that He would be killed *and then rise from the dead*. Multiple times He told them. The first had happened, but they did not believe the second would. And they all did not believe it. They all could not wrap their minds around such a statement. They were all unbelievers that day.

So when Thomas said, ***I will never believe***, what he meant was this: I will continue to believe . . . to believe what I know. That Jesus is not alive. That death is more powerful than Jesus. That Jesus talked a good game, did lots of great miracles, shook up the world, but lost in the end. The Jews won. The Romans won. Death won. Not Jesus. He's dead. This I know. It's what they all thought that day, at first.

Which means they were all dead that day, at first. Their hopes, dead. Their dreams, dead. Their faith, dead. Their future, dead. Because their friend and who they thought was their Saviour was dead. And what was alive was their fears, their confusion, their doubts. So they acted like dead men, entombing themselves in that room behind locked doors and barred windows.

But then someone with the key came. And I don't mean the key to those locked doors and barred windows! The one we heard about in the reading from Revelation, the one who has ***the keys of Death and Hades***. The one who ***died*** and is ***alive forevermore***, just as He had told them. And when you have *those* keys, to unlock death and the grave, what chance does a locked door, a barred window, or even a prison with bars and guards have to keep you out? So Jesus appears. The *living* Jesus. He didn't break down or unlock the doors or

windows. He didn't need to. Just as the large stone that sealed His tomb wasn't rolled away to let Him out, but to show that He was already gone - risen from the dead. Because when you have the keys to unlock death and the grave, what chance does a stone have - no matter how big - to hold you in?

So just as Peter and John ran to the tomb that had once sealed in Jesus, but found Him not there, so Jesus goes to the tomb that they had sealed themselves into, that locked and barred room, to let them out; to give them life from the dead and set them free. And the key to set them free, the key to unlock their doubts and fears, is the same key as the key to death and the grave - **the key of forgiveness**. For death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Death was ushered into our world by the sin of Adam and Eve (Romans 5). The soul who sins is the soul who will die (Ezekiel 18). So if sin is atoned for, paid for, then death and the grave are unlocked. Then the power and hold of death and the grave is gone. Then you have life. **Forgiveness is the key.**

Which you know from a much smaller scale, from your own life. Let's say you messed up. I mean, you *really* messed up. Think of something from your own life. Or, say you took something of your Mom or Dad's and broke it. Something they needed, or really loved. Something that had belonged to their grandpa, irreplaceable. And you didn't break it just a little, you smashed it. Broken beyond repair. And they're going to find out. You know they're going to find out. And soon. It's all you can think about, worry about. And what's going to happen to you when they do! . . . And then the moment comes. And you've never been more scared in your life! But instead of bringing the hammer down - a hammer which got bigger and bigger in your mind the longer this went on! - you heard this instead: *I forgive you*. . . . What? That's it? And with just those words, your fear and anxiety, your dread and despair, are gone. *You can live again.*

So it was in that room that night. The one who has the key to life, to living, to unlocking us from our dread and despair, the fear and anxiety of our sins, death, the grave, and hell - all of it! - comes to them and gives them life. **Peace be with you**, He says. Peace for troubled minds. Peace for anxious hearts. Peace that I do not hold your sins, your failures, your doubts, your unbelief, against you - *I forgive you*. And suddenly, they could live again! They **were glad**, they rejoiced! Jesus was alive, and now they, too, were alive. And just as Jesus had left His tomb, so they walked out of their locked and barred tomb that night.

And when they did, they went and found Thomas. Maybe just because he was their friend and fellow disciple; but *maybe* Jesus told them to. Maybe when Jesus appeared to them that night, He looked at them and counted one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten . . . wait, what? Where's Thomas? Go tell Thomas! Go unlock Thomas from his prison house of fear and death. For **as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you**. . . . **If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven**. So go tell Thomas. Go forgive Thomas. Set Thomas free. Give Thomas life.

But Thomas did not believe them. That's the thing about forgiveness - it can be real, but if

you don't believe it, you still live in fear and dread and death. Your Mom and Dad can say *I forgive you* for breaking what was so important to them, but if you don't believe it, you still live in fear and dread of that hammer of their wrath coming down on you. Sooner or later.

So for seven more days, Thomas lived in dread and fear and sadness. Did he not see the change in the others? Did he not wonder? Makes you feel sad for Thomas, doesn't it?

Then *on the eighth day*, John tells us - not just the eighth day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, but the day of life, the day of eternity, the day unlike any other that came before it because the power of death and the grave had been broken - they re-enact that night for Thomas. Same room. Same locked doors and barred windows. Same Jesus. Same words. ***Peace be with you.*** Plural you. All of you. But then personal you. You, Thomas. Peace be with you. I do not condemn you. In fact, here - if it's the nail holes that will make you believe, then here. Go ahead. Poke me. Prod me. This is why I came. To give this Body and Blood for you and to you. And it is Easter for Thomas. He is raised from the dead. Now he lives and confesses: ***My Lord and my God! I Know That My Redeemer Lives*** (LSB #461)! But Thomas' joy is not the greatest in that room that night - Jesus' is. That *Thomas* now lives and is free.

And now that same Body and Blood that Jesus offered to Thomas to poke and prod He now offers to you to eat and drink. That you be forgiven, believe, and live. For the sins which cause you dread are forgiven. Swallowed up in His victory. The death that will come upon you and the grave your body will be placed into cannot hold you. They've been overcome by His resurrection. You belong to the one with the keys to death and the grave. So you will live. And you can live now. Free from fear, anxiety, or dread. You can say - as you did say - with Thomas: *I Know That My Redeemer Lives!*

For ***blessed are those who have not seen*** - that's you - ***and yet have believed.*** Believed the word that has been proclaimed to you. The word of forgiveness. The word of life. The word of victory. The word that sets you blessedly free.

And John says that's why he wrote his Gospel: ***these are written so that you may believe*** - not what you know, not what you think - but that you may believe ***that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life*** - freedom, forgiveness - ***in his name.***

The kind of freedom and life those disciples - now apostles - had, which we heard about in the reading from Acts. It hadn't been that many days since they had locked themselves into that room in fear. But now they were different. Changed. Now they couldn't be stopped. Now they had no fear. The Jews that had crucified Jesus were threatening them ***and they didn't care.*** Because what could the Jews do to them? Jesus has the keys to death and the grave. Jesus has the forgiveness that set them free, and told them to go set others free with that same forgiveness. When they spoke, when they forgave, it would be Him speaking, Him forgiving. So they did. Maybe even feeling sorry for the Jewish leaders . . . for the

forgiveness that was real and true and for them, but they didn't believe.

Now that word and that forgiveness is spoken here, **for you**. To raise you from the dead in Baptism, to set you free with forgiveness, to give you confidence and joy in each and every word and promise of God fulfilled in Jesus, and to give you the Body and Blood of Jesus once poked and prodded by Thomas to eat and to drink. That you live. And when you do, Jesus rejoices. *In you*.

And maybe others see a change in you, and wonder. And you can tell them - as the disciples told Thomas - of sins forgiven, of death defeated, of the grave opened. You can tell them of a Saviour not who burdens, but who sets free. Not one who demands, but who gives. Who doesn't demand you give your life for Him, but who gives His life for you. A Saviour who doesn't make you earn His favor, but forgives. Who says *peace be with you*, and gives that peace.

Like with Thomas, maybe they won't believe, but say *I will never believe*, unless . . . They'll believe only what they know, what they think, what they see and feel and touch. And we'll be sad for them. And pray that Jesus work in them as He has worked in us.

But maybe they will believe. The reading from Acts said many did then; maybe many will today. Forgiveness is powerful. People are dying to live. There's only one who holds that key. Who opens the grave. Who gives life to the dead, hope to the hopeless, and a joy that cannot die. That no matter what we have broken, how we have failed, we have hope. And not just that we may get away with it, but that it's gone. Forgiven. Defeated. By our Saviour. And then His gifts given - freedom, life, and joy. That not just one day a year, but *everyday*, be Easter for us. Everyday a day of life and joy. Everyday a day of confidence and peace. Everyday a day to know that my Redeemer lives! For **Christ is risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] And therefore so are you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.