

“Who is this man?” John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.” Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, 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.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so 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 Sunday we celebrated Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The most important event in our history. Today for our meditations we have these verses from the gospel according to John which deal with an aftermath of Jesus resurrection.

Are these verses important for us? Why? Why should we pay any attention to them? Why should we meditate upon them 2000 years later? Because they apply directly to us. Directly to you. To each of you. How? We'll see it in a minute.

Today we'll try to focus only on one question. Who was, who is this Jesus Christ? What do these verses, what do these events tell us about the identity of Jesus Christ and its relevance for us today. For this is the key question. Who is Jesus?

What did Jesus teach about Himself? How did John, His beloved disciple recorded it? What did Jesus claim to be from the very beginning of His public ministry, after He was baptized by John the Baptist?

Sometimes people say that Jesus never said that He was God. Why would we believe that He was? And why would it matter? Let's see. We can agree that we do not have recorded Jesus saying that “I am God.”

But we have something else. First, that was John the Baptist's testimony: “I have seen and have borne witness that this [Jesus] is the Son of God.” (John 1:34) When Jesus cleansed the Temple, He called it ‘my Father's house’.

When Jesus healed a man in Sabbath this is what happened. “The Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18) They got it right. The Jews understood Jesus claims well.

When Jesus was having a discussion with them about Abraham, again they got it right, that He claimed to be the Son of God and... wanted to stone Him. When on another occasion the Jews wanted to understand whether Jesus was the Christ, the promised Saviour, or not, He replied.

“I and the Father are one.” And ‘the Jews picked up stones again to stone him. [...] “we are going to stone you ... for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” (John 10:30-33)

Finally when the leaders brought Jesus to Pilate and demanded His death, what was the reason to ask for a death penalty? What had He done wrong? Nothing. It was not about what He had done, it was about who He was, or, at least, who He claimed to be.

This is how John recorded it for us. “When the chief priests and the officers saw Jesus, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”

The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.” (John 19:6-7) You can see that all this was about one thing and one thing only.

About Jesus’ identity. About who He claimed to be, or - who He truly was. The crucifixion was demanded for Jesus was found guilty - He claimed to be the Son of God. One with the Father.

Equal with God. What a ‘terrible’ crime! Not something that you have done, but something who you claimed to be. How could Jesus vindicate such a bold claim? What could He do to prove that He was not a liar?

You see if this was the basis for all accusations, if Jesus’ identity was what was contested, then for Jesus to vindicate Himself He actually had to prove that He was, that He is who He claimed to be. The Son of God.

How could you prove something like that? How can you prove that you are God? I guess, if you can somehow show that you are in control over everything. Over everything. Literary. This is exactly what Jesus was about to do.

Besides, He was actually telling about it again and again, that He will go to Jerusalem, will suffer from His enemies, will be killed, and ... the last part sounded just too weird for someone to take it seriously, - that He will rise from the dead.

Hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses had seen that Jesus had powers which no one could have. He was able to do things which no human could do. It seemed that He could bend the laws of creation as He wanted.

He even raised Lazarus from the dead, many saw it and entire Jerusalem was deeply disturbed. What to make of this event?! Obviously Jesus was someone quite unique. But to rise from the dead, after you are killed...

No one expected it. Women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. On the third day. His disciples were scared and were hiding behind locked doors. And then they received these strange news that Jesus' body wasn't in the tomb.

What was going on? And then, as we read, suddenly Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you!" It's me. Come and see my hands. It's me. How can someone prove that He is the Son of God?

If He has control over everything. Even over our ultimate enemy – death. We as humanity can do so much, we have achieved so much, know so much, but there is nothing that we could do with death. It comes and takes us one by one.

But there He was, Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God, who foretold that He will be crucified, but then will rise from the dead. There He was. Standing among His disciples. Come and see – it's me.

I did everything as I promised. Now you know who I am. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Week later He came and stood among them once more, inviting Thomas to see that it is, indeed, Him, risen Jesus Christ. Seeing Jesus Thomas could only reply: "My Lord and my God!" That was Jesus. The same Jesus. He was who He claimed to be. The Son of God.

We can see that the whole Gospel according John was leading up to this point. To assure everyone that Jesus was who He claimed to be. To assure you that Jesus was who He claimed to be. This is how John wraps up his gospel account.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written *so that you* may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

This is the sentence which refers to each of us. It is written for each of us. For you. These [things] are written *so that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

This is why we all are here. Because of Jesus Christ. Because He, indeed, was who He claimed to be. The Son of God. His resurrection, His triumph over death served as a proof to everything that He had said before.

I'll repeat it once more, for this is so important. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the only way to the Father. By His resurrection He proved that He truly was who He claimed to be.

It means that everything He said, everything He promised is true. The truth is revealed. The truth about us and the truth about God. Now everyone can know who God is, and even more important, what His attitude towards you is.

We still live in the world, where many things don't make sense. But you can know for sure that true God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit wants to be your God [!], that He will be with you no matter what happens.

That at the end, He will have you with Him in His Kingdom. No one is going to snatch you out from the Father's hand. Yes, we still are slaves to sin and death and can't stand against them. True.

But Jesus Christ, the Son of God has defeated them and has come to give you freedom. Freedom, peace, security and eternal life. You are His disciples. In your baptism you are made members of Jesus family.

You are His, you are under His protection. Remember, when Jesus disciples thought that He was dead, they were afraid. In their fear they were hiding behind the locked doors. Sometimes you may fear different things.

You may fear about your future, about your safety, about your health, about your daily bread, about how to provide for your family, about how to live in this competitive and sometimes hostile society, and more and more.

There are many good reasons for our fear, as there were good reasons for disciples to fear their enemies. But now we know that Jesus is the Christ, He is risen, and He is with us till the end of the age.

You know how the disciples changed after they had seen Jesus? From bunch of frightened men they changed into the apostles. As Jesus was sent by the Father, they went out sent by Jesus, proclaiming Jesus identity and the good news that everyone can have a life in His name.

Now you also know who Jesus Christ is. You know that you have life in His name. You can be sure that there is nothing you need to fear. Your Heavenly Father is with you. You can, you should go and do what the apostle did; tell everyone about who Jesus is. For He is the Son of God and He is your God. God who is always with you, till the end of the age. Amen.