

“You doubt? They all did...” 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.

The focus of our today’s meditations will be on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because the resurrection is at the very heart of Biblical message. And it is the very linchpin of our Christian faith.

And it is also such an unbelievable event. How many times our friends and relatives have repeated this question: “How can you, living in 21st century, still believe that someone who was dead came back alive?”

This is what we are going to reflect on today. How hard it is to believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What makes someone to believe it? And what changes when we do believe it?

How hard it is to believe, what makes someone to believe it, and what it changes. So, first, **how hard is it to believe the Jesus Christ rouse from the dead.** You know the answer. Unless you are brought up in the Church – it is very hard to believe, very hard, indeed.

In our society many look at Christians perplexed at best and often with ridicule sneering – how can anyone be so naïve to believe these stories?! Those who don’t believe the resurrection, or struggle to believe it, are not alone. We could say that they are in a very good company. In the same company with the apostles and other closest disciples of Jesus.

What do I mean? Do you remember what was Jesus foretelling His disciples again and again as they were heading to Jerusalem? That He will be mocked and flogged and crucified, and then He will be raised on the third day.

Then it happened. Exactly as Jesus had foretold. How did Jesus' disciples react? Did anyone say: "O, yes, remember, this is what Jesus told us earlier – that He will be raised from the dead! It's coming..."

No one... On that morning women went to take care of Jesus' dead body. What a great surprise! The tomb was open and the body was gone. What did they think? "Alleluia, Jesus is risen!" Not at all...

Mary Magdalen finds the tomb empty and runs to Peter and John. "They have taken Him..." Who are they? Other women enter the tomb and see angels there, and they announce to them the Good News, that Jesus is risen.

What do these women do? As Mark has recorded – they went away and said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. Then Peter and John run to the tomb, and found it empty. "Our Lord is risen, as He had promised!"

Nothing like that... they went home marveling at what had happened. At some point the women had told the Twelve and the other disciples that they had seen the risen Jesus. How did that go? As Luke has recorded it:

"These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Then finally Jesus appears to the Twelve, and only Thomas is missing. They see Him and touch Him and eat with the risen Jesus... they are overjoyed!

It's true! Jesus is risen! When Thomas shows up, excited they tell Him what has just happened... and Thomas, you know, Thomas just couldn't take it. "Are you kidding me! Unless I see Him, I am not going to believe you!"

One thing that the Gospel accounts teach us about the resurrection of Jesus is this – it is really hard to believe it. It is true now, and it was true then. Those who doubt it, those who just can't accept that it indeed happened, they are in a good company; at first, none of Jesus' chosen disciples believed it either.

But why did they believe after all, and even more importantly – **what makes someone to believe it today?** The problem with believing the resurrection of Jesus is not that it is hard to believe, the issue is this – what criteria do we use to assess what is believable and what is not? Or put it differently – who do we choose to believe?

This is our problem. And we have two options here. To trust ourselves or to trust this God who reveals Himself in Jesus. And we want to trust ourselves, we want to make up our own mind. We all do. And if we trust ourselves, if we want to determine ourselves what is believable and what is not, how do we do it?

Mostly based on our experience and our knowledge. If you haven't seen anyone raised from the dead, then the resurrection of Jesus does seem unbelievable. If

you know how this world usually works – that when people die, they are dead and there is no way for them to come back, it seems almost impossible to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Then your experience and the experience of others, whom you trust, determine what is believable for you and what is not. But see! then the world for us is as limited as our experiences are. And that is a small world to inhabit, indeed.

Now, about this another alternative. Trusting God who speaks to us. He wants us to know the truth. He wants it badly. He wants to assure us that Jesus has risen. How could that be done? By confirming it beyond the reasonable doubt.

This is exactly what He did. After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples. Not to one of two, not just once. He appeared again and again not only to the closest, but all together to more than five hundred of His disciples.

He spoke with them, He ate with them, He invited them to make sure that it was Him, they touched Him, they spent time with Him, and they believed... And [!] most of these eyewitnesses were still alive when the New Testament was written. They could testify about its truthfulness.

We also know the effect that the appearing of the risen Jesus had on His disciples. Once they had seen the risen Jesus, they were transformed. The Twelve and many others went around testifying boldly about what they had seen and experienced. They didn't fear death anymore.

They had seen the glimpse of the other side in risen and glorious Jesus. Even when their lives were threatened, they didn't revoke their testimonies. They went to the ends of the earth, not to teach some new religion; they went proclaiming what God has done in Jesus Christ and what they have seen and heard and experienced, and what it means for the entire world, and for us.

Once their lives were heading towards to end, they wrote down what they had seen and witnessed. Why? Actually, they did it for you. John summarized it so well: "[This is] 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 our Father's sincere and heartfelt desire for every human being – that we all may know the truth and may have life in Jesus' name.

You see, if we ourselves determine what is believable, we begin with trusting that our experience and reason are sufficient for knowing the truth about this amazing world. But How can that possibly be enough with all our limitations?

On the other hand, if we listen to God who speaks to us, then we begin with trusting hundreds of eyewitnesses that the resurrection of Jesus is what not only determines what is believable, but also reveals the truth about this world.

Then we begin to see the world through the resurrection of Jesus. So, what does this mean for us? **What does it practically change for me?** How is the world different if I see it through the resurrection of Jesus?

O boy! Everything is different. This one essential difference – being willing to listen to our God, instead of relying on ourselves – changes everything. Once we realize that Jesus Christ is risen, we begin to inhabit much greater, much more adventurous and joyful world.

This is what it looks like. Now we begin to see the world as the Triune God Himself reveals it to us. Now everything in this world begins to make sense and fits into one beautiful and coherent picture.

Now you can see the entire history of the world as having meaning and purpose. From creation to new creation. You know that there is this benevolent Creator who designed this wonderful world and also cares for us every minute.

Now you can understand what is wrong with this world and ourselves. Our sin and self-centredness. That is what makes us less than our God intended us to be, that explains our foolish behaviours. And you know what God's solution is.

To be just and merciful, to destroy the sin and to offer the gift of forgiveness and new life to everyone. You know that the Holy God has invited you to repent of your sins, to turn away from the slavery to idols, to receive His forgiveness and freedom through Jesus and to be embraced into God's family; that He wants you to know Him as your just and merciful Father who is in heaven.

Now you know what His attitude towards you is and to what length He was ready to go so that only He could bring you into His Kingdom, to be with Him, to live and reign with Him, to enjoy the blessedness and joy of His presence.

And He has also revealed what He is going to do, what the ultimate destination is for all who respond to Jesus' invitation. Death is not the end, there is the other side – New Heavens and New Earth — perfect, without sin or sickness or pain or death. And nothing sinful and unclean will ever enter there, only those who are written in the Book of Life. Only those who are made holy by Jesus.

But! ... to know that Jesus has risen, it is not only about our future in the age to come, as some mock the Gospel message. "Shut up and suffer now, and then you will have good things in the world to come." No!

If we see the world through the resurrection of Jesus, then the new life for us begins already now. Once we trust the testimony of God, there are so many wonderful things that happen with us right away.

As we read, our Father has sent His Son Jesus, and Jesus has sent His Church to bring you His gift of forgiveness. You receive this gift here and now and you receive a good conscience and can look forward to what comes after this life with hopes and excitement.

Our Father fills you with His joy, for that is a marvellous thing to know and to be known by God Himself. For He is not a distant god, He has come as one of us, He understands you – your fears and your longings, and He cares for you.

He bestows upon you His peace – “peace be with you!” – for He assures you that you are loved and cared more than you could ever dare to dream, and you are in the safest of hands. He shares with you His wisdom, and it is so satisfying to understand this world, and to know the truth.

He welcomes you in His family, with countless brothers and sisters, and many of them we meet already in this life. Our Father sends them to bless you, and to share the joys of knowing Jesus Christ and having this new life in Him. I pray that many of you have experienced and appreciated this gift of Christian fellowship and conversations especially during these last few weeks.

As we reflected, it is hard to believe Jesus’ resurrection. But it is by no means unreasonable. We just need to re-evaluate – who do we trust. It is actually much more reasonable to admit that Jesus is risen and that our lives are in the hands of this gracious God, than to deny the obvious and to imagine that we are some self-sufficient and autonomous creatures.

And because we know with certainty that Jesus has risen, it makes for us the whole difference in the world, and not just in the age to come, but already today. For we know that He is with us and that His is in control. We know that one day we will be with the risen Jesus on the other side and will see Him as He is, and will be glorious and beautiful like Him.

For now, may the Holy Spirit help us all to trust the one true God, to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus and in what it means for us and faithfully to confess together with Thomas: “My Lord and my God!”

Amen.