

John 20:19-31 - “Growing Old Gracefully”

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What do you suppose Thomas’ life was like that first week after Jesus’ resurrection? Remember he wasn’t with the other disciples on that first Easter Sunday to see Jesus with his physical eyes, and he refused to believe the other disciples who said the Jesus had risen from the dead. Do you suppose he continued to feel afraid, confused, disappointed, and heartbroken? I would imagine so.

And if Thomas would have continued to reject the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead, he would have spent the rest of his life full of confusion, disappointment, bitterness, anger and fear. I don’t know of anyone who wants to live their life that way. That’s why I’ve entitled the sermon, “Growing Old Gracefully.” That’s what our Lord wants for each one of us in this life, from the moment we are born and born-again, like Juniper, in the waters of Holy Baptism. Instead of growing old grumpily, He wants us to grow old gracefully, or full of His grace and peace, for, growing old gracefully is good not only for us, it’s also good for others of this world who know us. But it’s not something that comes naturally for us sinners.

How was your week after last Sunday’s Easter celebration? Did you have any troubles, worries or fears? If so, then you’ve come to the right place. Even if you had a good week, you’ve still come to the right place. For this is the place where our risen Lord promises to be present to breathe and keep on breathing His eternal life giving Word, Spirit and peace into our lives.

It was a place like this that Thomas went to, one week after Jesus’ resurrection, to meet with fellow Christians and the Lord Himself, even though that was not what he was expecting. As they gathered together, like we are here today, the Lord “*came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’*”

This was not an empty greeting from our Lord. This was pure Gospel. It was like the absolution at the beginning of the service, when the Lord, using my voice box, said “*I forgive you all your sins.*” These words of our crucified and risen Lord still have the power to do what they say because the Lord is standing here among us to back them up—to forgive the grumpy ways we have treated others, and to give us the peace that He established for us through His death in payment for our sins, and resurrection from the dead to verify this Good News.

It’s at this point that we don’t follow the science or our human reason. Instead, God gives us faith to follow Christ. Thomas’ renewed faith was obvious when he worshiped Jesus saying, “*My Lord and my God!*” Even though Thomas saw Jesus’ wounds with his own eyes, it wasn’t seeing Jesus’ wounds that gave him peace. For all Thomas knew, Jesus could have been there to condemn him because of his stubborn unbelief. Instead, Jesus said, “*Peace be with you.*” These words of our Lord are what gave Thomas true peace of mind.

This is how God makes it possible for Thomas and us to “Grow Old Gracefully.” He gives us the new life of faith in His promise of forgiveness and eternal life with Him. The Lord created this new life in Juniper at the beginning of the service, which will continue to grow like the physical life God gave her through her parents. But instead of growing older, and dying, like the life we’re born with, this new born-again life grows stronger and healthier through God’s Word.

There are so many people today who live miserable, grumpy lives worrying about money, about their children, about their future, about their health. Am I talking about you to a certain extent? I'm not saying that life in this world is easy, or that your problems are not serious. As the saying goes, "Growing old ain't for sissies." But I am saying that God is infinitely bigger than all our troubles in this life.

Jesus has risen from the dead, which was the biggest cloud over our lives ("*the shadow of death*" Psalm 23:4), and He promises through His death and resurrection that our sins are forgiven. This means that almighty God is with us not to condemn us but to give and keep on giving us all we need to repent of our sins and trust in His promise of an eternal future with Him in paradise. I'm not talking about necessarily giving us the things of this world that are falling apart like us, but giving us the eternal things of God, His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion, through which He breathes and keeps on breathing His eternal life into us.

In the light of these promises of God, He enables us to see how foolish it is to worry, or to not take advantage of the personal contact with our Lord which He makes possible through His Word and Sacraments. He also enables us to see what a blessing it is to be able to take all our sins in repentance and faith to God our Father, as dear children to their dear Father, knowing that He will forgive us because of what our dear brother, Jesus Christ, did for us through His death and resurrection. What a blessing it is to know and believe that we are members of God's family, and that He is here to enable us to overcome our grumpy sinful behavior in the past, and to trust in His promises for our future so that we can "Grow Old Gracefully"—full of His grace and peace, and can share the peace of Christ with others, in Jesus' name and for His namesake.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] When we were born we, like Juniper, inherited the sinful nature of our first parents, Adam and Eve, which covered us like this blanket, weighing us down. And whenever we disobey God, like Adam and Eve, we add to the weight of this blanket. Where would we end up if we kept going down, down, down? Our sins would take us to live forever with the devil.

That's why God's Son became a man in Jesus Christ, so that He could not only be covered with the sins of Adam and Eve and our sins, but so that He could get rid of our sins before they get rid of us. When Jesus died on the cross He took all our sins all the way down, down, down to hell. But then, because He is not only a man who could die, but is also God, He could rise from the dead in victory over our sins, death and the devil. After Jesus rose from the dead, He didn't grow any older, instead He grew up—up, up, up into His home in paradise, and He promises that we will too.

What grows old is our life in this world. What grows up is our new life in Jesus Christ which He created in us through His Word and Holy Baptism, when He washed away our sins [uncover helium balloon, letting it rise up]. And to keep us going up, up, up, instead of down, down, down, God continues to breath His Word into us whenever we read or hear His Word in the Bible.

Here is a bookmark that you can color and keep in your Bibles as you read it throughout your life in this world, to keep you growing up, up, up as God's eternal children in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior.