

Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

April 27+28, 2025 at Grace, Manitowoc, WI

Show Them His Hands and Side

Grief can lock you in a cage. Any sudden loss makes you feel powerless and afraid. What's going to happen next? You can't stand to bear any more pain. The overwhelming grip of grief can back you into a corner without any hope of escape.

We might be able to understand where the disciples were at that Sunday evening. After years of growing confidence in their teacher and friend, they'd experienced that sting of death. The man they had hoped would lead their nation to new and greater heights was arrested and executed. And if the Jews could do this to Jesus, what was going to happen to them? This group of followers cowered in their closed room, confused and concerned about their future.

Throughout that first day of the week, the disciples got strange reports that pulled on their emotions even more. The stone that covered Jesus' tomb had been rolled away, and his body was gone. The Jewish leaders started spreading a rumor that those disciples stole Jesus away during the night. Multiple people claimed they saw Jesus throughout the day - the women who went out to the tomb early that morning, Mary Magdalene personally, Simon Peter who had denied knowing Jesus, and two others came running back after walking and talking with Jesus on the road to a village called Emmaus. Could it be true? What was real? What now?

In the commotion of the grief and the reports and the confusion, even though the doors were locked, **“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.”** You with hurting hearts, here is all the proof you need. He is not dead; he has risen! This isn't some ghost, not an apparition who merely looks like Jesus through blurry eyes. Look at the hands and see the nail marks; look at his side, where the soldiers pierced him to prove he died. This is Jesus, your Lord and friend, who gave his life for you.

And he says to you, “Peace be with you.” This was a typical Hebrew greeting, the *shalom* that wished well-being on any family or friend. But

Jesus proclaims a peace greater than the world can offer. Because of Jesus' hands and side pierced for us, he has taken our sins away. He carried the burden of all the world's sin to the cross and paid the ultimate sacrifice. Those scars serve as an eternal reminder of what Jesus did. When the disciples saw those marks, they knew this was their compassionate Lord who cares for sinners, who loves the lowly, who brought the kingdom of God. And they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord, hands, side, and all.

Now there was one disciple, Thomas, who wasn't there in that locked room. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there or where he was. But he missed this initial opportunity for peace. Grief had its effect on Thomas too. His friends brought him the good news: **“We have seen the Lord!”** But Thomas wouldn't believe it unless he saw for himself. He wanted to put his finger and hand into those telltale wounds. Until then, this was just some story the others were making up, some delusion of their grief.

The scene resets a week later, the next Sunday. The disciples gathered inside behind locked doors again, and this time Thomas was with them. But no latch and bar could stop Jesus. **He came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”** A peace which knows no end. Without Thomas having to tell Jesus his request, without any prompting, Jesus invited Thomas to look and see, to reach out, to touch him. Don't be in disbelief; believe!

What joy for Thomas to get physical proof! What a comfort for these disciples to be eyewitnesses of the Savior of the world! How blessed they are, that they could personally say, each and every one of them, “My Lord and my God!” Their teacher and friend was the manifested master of the world, the Lord who is the Yahweh of the OT, the one, true God who has the power over death, who defeated the enemy.

These special friends who walked and talked with the Son of God also received a special gift from him. After Jesus showed them his hands and side, he **breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”** This doesn't mean that they didn't have faith through the Holy Spirit previously. This is a special gift of the Spirit, much like we hear about spiritual gifts in other parts of the NT.

Why did Jesus breathe out the Holy Spirit here? He gave his disciples a responsibility - not just the chosen Twelve, because two of those Twelve weren't there, Judas and Thomas; plus other disciples were gathered in that locked room. So, Jesus gives this special gift to *all* his believers, for those on that first evening and for all moving forward: **“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

Jesus paid for the forgiveness of all sins of all time. He proved that by the marks in his hands and side. Now, Jesus wanted his disciples to go out and share this glorious news. As the Father sent Jesus to announce the kingdom of God, so Jesus employs his believers in that kingdom work. He’s sending us to share the saving truth. He’s encouraging us to show his hands and side. We need to tell others to examine those marks and see the love of Jesus for them.

We might feel like those disciples in that room were extra special. They got to see Jesus, to touch him, to hear that proclamation of peace, to have the Spirit breathed out on them. But Jesus makes sure we know that we’re blessed too. It was good that those disciples got released from the grip of grief and were sent out in the Spirit. We are grateful for their mission work.

But we can already hear in the apostle John’s testimony how blessed we are. Even though we haven’t seen Jesus with our eyes, we have heard the records written by eyewitnesses. We didn’t get to follow along and see every last sign and listen to every single sermon. But the signs given are sure so that we have certified confidence in Jesus.

These words are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. When we read the testaments about the risen Lord, we receive the Holy Spirit. We become convinced, even without seeing, that this man is the Promised One. Each and every one of us can examine Jesus’ words and works and say, “*My* Lord and *my* God!” We *have* seen his hands and side. We have witnessed the blood he shed to make us clean. We are confident that Jesus is with us, present to bring us peace in our locked rooms of grief and fear. Best of all, we believe that in his name, we have life - a life that is meaningful, that has a purpose and a mission. Life that is blessed now and forever.

In this life that Jesus gives us in his name, we do have a meaningful mission. We’ve received the Holy Spirit who gives us faith to believe that we’re saved. The Holy Spirit also sends us to spread this saving truth. When the women who went to the tomb were filled with Easter joy, what did they do? They hurried off to tell the rest. When the Emmaus disciples realized they had seen Jesus, what did they do? They rushed the 7 miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others. When Thomas missed that first Easter evening, did the others keep it a secret? No! They kept on telling him, **“We have seen the Lord!”**

Since Jesus showed us his hands and side through the testimony of faithful witnesses, we want to show others. We are well-equipped for this mission. Jesus proclaims his peace for when we’re nervous about how people will react. He gives us the Holy Spirit, the Counselor who will teach us the words to say. Jesus comes and stands in the midst of us; he promises to be with us always.

And he assures us that if we forgive someone’s sins, they are forgiven; it’s true in heaven! If someone holds on to their sins and rejects Jesus’ sacrifice for them, we have the responsibility to withhold forgiveness. Jesus’ hands and side bore their grief and pain; these stubborn sinners need to know that too. Let our testimony lead them to true sorrow for what they’ve done.

As we are filled with peace and joy this Easter season, let’s find ways to show people Jesus’ hands and side. Can you be the Christian shoulder that picks up a friend who’s weighed down? Can you have servant’s hands that do the dirty work that others would despise? Will you reach out to tell the doubting, the atheists, those who say they will never believe? Where do you see those who need to know Jesus?

The Father sent Jesus to live, die, and rise for these people. As the Father sent his Son, God is sending you. He’s empowered you to show others what he did for them. God has put his Word in your hands, these records of all the signs that point to Jesus. This Word was written so that you may believe that Jesus is your Christ, your Lord, and your God. AND this Word was written so that *they* may believe too. Show them his hands and side that they may have life in his name. Amen.