

30 March, 2008  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
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Today's lessons are on trust and believing. There is a saying, "Seeing is believing". We hear how the disciples were in the upper room where they had the last supper with their beloved leader, Jesus. They had the doors locked, they were meeting in fear or terror of what might happen to them. They had just seen the deep bitterness of the Jews who had brought about the death of Christ. They were afraid that if caught, they would be the next ones put to death. As they sat there waiting for a knock on the door or people outside the door, Jesus appeared to them. He gave them the normal greeting of the day, "Peace be with you." This greeting means, "May God give you every good thing."

Jesus now commissioned the disciples. He told them that as God had sent him forth, he now was going to send them forth. The New Testament scholar, B.F. Westcott, called this 'The Charter of the Church'. This means that Jesus needs the Church, that he had come with a message for all people and he was not going to be able to deliver it himself. The Church was to be the mouth to speak for him, the feet to carry his message and the hands to do his work. Jesus knew his message would never get to everyone without the Church. He was very dependent on his church.

The Church also needs Jesus. The people being sent forth need someone to send them, a message to take. They need power and authority to support the message. They need someone to turn to when they are in doubt and difficulty. Without Jesus, the Church has no message, without him it has no power or authority to back up the message. Without him, there is no one to turn to for support, nothing to enlighten the mind, to strengthen the arm or encourage the heart. Therefore, the Church is also dependent on Jesus.

As Jesus was sent out by God, so Jesus sends out the disciples and their obedience to Christ is just as important as Jesus' obedience was to God. It takes perfect obedience and love of Jesus to be a messenger of Christ.

Jesus breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. Just as God created man from dust and then he breathed life into him, so Jesus breathed life into the disciples. In Ezekiel 37, we see how God breathed into the fallen soldiers and they came to life. The prophet Ezekiel, prophesied to the four winds that breathed on them and they stood on their feet – a vast army. The coming of the Holy Spirit into the disciples is like the waking of life from the dead. This empowered the disciples to heal the sick, forgive sins, and [begin] the spread of the Christian church.

Jesus told them they could forgive the sins of anyone and they would be forgiven or if they didn't forgive them, then the sins would be retained. They were to convey the forgiveness of God to the world. If they knew that the people were penitent, then they could give forgiveness, but if they had no penitence in their hearts, there was no

forgiveness for them until their hearts were altered. The value of the message given depends on the messenger. And Jesus couldn't find a better group to convey his message than the disciples, because they knew him best.

We then have the doubter, Thomas. News came that Lazarus had died and Jesus was asked to come and bring him back to life. Lazarus was in Bethany, the town who had tried to stone Jesus the last time he was there. Thomas had suggested that they all go with Jesus back to Bethany so that if Jesus died they would all die with him. Thomas was a natural pessimist. Thomas loved Jesus and was willing to die with him, where some of the other disciples were reluctant to go with Jesus.

Because he had seen Jesus die on the cross, it was hard to believe that he came back to them. Thomas had missed the first time that Jesus came to them because he had to mourn the loss of Jesus, and suffer by himself. The next week when Jesus came back, Thomas was there, and Jesus invited Thomas to do the test that he had made. Thomas was so overcome by Jesus coming back that all he could say was, "My Lord and my God." Jesus then told Thomas, "Thomas, you need the eyes of sight to believe; but the day will come when people will see with the eye of faith and believe."

Thomas made a mistake. He withdrew from the Christian fellowship. He took loneliness rather than togetherness. He was not there and missed the first coming of Christ. We miss a lot when we separate ourselves from the Christian fellowship and try being alone. A lot can happen to us when we are in fellowship that will not happen when we are alone. When sorrow and sadness gets us, we tend to shut ourselves off and refuse to meet people. But that is the time when we should seek fellowship with Christ's people.

Thomas had two great virtues. His honesty would not let him say he believed when he had doubts or that he understood when he didn't. He would not say a creed unless he completely understood it. Then when he did doubt something, he said so and there was no halfway or maybe. He was either sure or he didn't surrender until he was certain. Once Thomas was sure and once he had counted the cost, he was the man who went to the limit of faith and obedience.

A third world bishop spoke about the peace in his country. Instead of saying "the peace of the Lord be with you", what is said to others is, "I love the face of Christ I see." In order to see Christ, we only need to look at the person next to us. Love the Christ you cannot see and love the face of Christ you see in each of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of Christ, help us to see Christ in others. Help us to believe and understand as Thomas did. Guide us when we go astray.

Amen