

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Satisfaction Guaranteed

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Satisfaction guaranteed. That's a good thing, right? I mean, if a purchase doesn't quite live up to our expectations, we get our money back. If the kitchen gets our order wrong, they make it right. If you don't like something as much as you thought when you clicked on it, you can return it. No questions asked. Satisfaction guaranteed.

It's a good thing, expect when it is taken too far. The customer really isn't always right. Some have defrauded stores by taking advantage of generous return policies. The teacher isn't always the root cause of our kid's problems in the classroom, some kids have been known to be defiant and disobedient and even lazy in their studies. But because we want satisfaction, we fire off the emails and get on the phone with the administrators anyway. I'll never forget asking a fellow Little League coach, who also coached other sports at the high school level, what his dream head coaching position would be. He said at an orphanage.

Satisfaction guaranteed is certainly not a good thing when it is applied to God and the things of God. Because some are dissatisfied with how God's running the universe, they put together in their own minds from the bits and pieces of various religions a god that never fails to satisfy them. In large metro areas like ours there's always been almost nomadic Christians constantly on move from one church to another during their adult lives. While reasons are varied, the common thread in their stories is something about their current congregation inevitably dissatisfies them.

Which brings us to Thomas in today's Holy Gospel. He wasn't satisfied. He wasn't satisfied with the testimony of his fellow disciples that Jesus was alive. He would not believe it, unless he got satisfaction from Jesus himself. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Thomas was the first post-modern disciple. He wanted satisfaction guaranteed.

But then Jesus showed up, and suddenly Thomas is singing a different tune! "My Lord and my God!" (20:28) he cries. For it's easy to talk about someone, criticize and complain about someone when they're not there. But once they show up, things change! Once Jesus showed up, Thomas realized that his own satisfaction with God was irrelevant. What mattered was whether or not God was satisfied with him! For Thomas knew what he had said; how he had rejected the eye-witness testimony of his brothers; he knew how he had mouthed off his self-centered demands; how in so doing he had professed his unbelief. What would the Lord of life and death think of him now? What would Jesus do to him? What would Jesus say to him? Would he demand satisfaction of Thomas for such sinning?

And what of us who tend to put our own satisfaction ahead of the eye-witness testimony of his Apostles? That's what you are doing when you say 'I'm a member of this church because the pastor is nice ... or the music is what I like ... but I disagree with this or that doctrine.' But Jesus' own Word is doctrine. What's he supposed to say to being so blatantly dismissed? And what of our complaints about how he's running the world or our lives? What would Jesus say to you about such rebellious talk? Would he demand satisfaction?

Well, when Jesus did show up that second Sunday evening of Easter, he actually said, "Peace be with you" (20:26). Not, "You're such an awful and unworthy disciple, Thomas!" He even doesn't tell him how disappointed he is in him. He doesn't bring any of that up. And he never does! It's as if all the unbelief and doubt and fear and guilt had somehow been taken care of. It's as if Jesus was just happy to be with Thomas and the others and to give them peace. Peace of mind, peace of conscience, and peace of heart. The peace that they need.

In fact, that's precisely why he still shows up: to declare God's "satisfaction guaranteed." Jesus' death means God's immutable justice has been satisfied. The sin of our rebellious, self-centered attitudes and actions has been paid for in full on the cross. And Jesus' resurrection means that now when God looks at us he sees not a bunch of people to judge on whether we've lived up to his holy standard. He sees his justified children, the ones he is most happy to be among giving the peace that comes from knowing that in Christ God is completely satisfied with you. The nail holes and spear wound on his resurrected and glorified body literally guarantee it!

Jesus also knows this is so hard for us to believe (for we know what we say and do and think when he's not around) that he keeps coming to us again and again in Word and Sacraments to give us peace. The peace of mind that comes from the assurance of his mercy that is his body and blood in Holy Communion. The peace of conscience that results from the forgiveness of sins. The peace of heart that washes over us whenever we recall our baptisms into him. This peace is what his Church is all about.

And think about how we always leave this place. It's with the blessing of this peace – not his judgment – upon us. We take it with us to live a new life on account of it. Not the same old life, but a new life. For as we heard in today's Second Lesson, "He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). One that knows the troubles and problems we face, the challenges that we come up against, and the struggles that sometimes severely shake us, are not arbitrary and do not come because God is being unfair or judgmental. But as we heard, they come for our good. To test us and try us, and make us stronger by driving us to a greater reliance on what he thinks of us opposed to what we think of him. And just as God did not abandon his Son to the grave, so he will not abandon us to any trouble in this world. For we have been raised with Christ in the forgiveness of our sins.

So while there will always be people in this world who are not quite satisfied with God – including sometimes you and me – today we've heard the answer to the only question that matters in the end: Is God satisfied with me? And the answer of the empty tomb is Yes! Christ has died so our sins are gone! Christ is risen so we have peace! Christ will come again to share with us his eternal life! God's satisfaction is guaranteed! And that's a great thing!

Amen.