**John 20:19-31 April 24, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, John chapter 20 here re-reading these words. “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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

After yesterday’s historic hit there is no denying that Miguel Cabrera will be in the baseball Hall of Fame. 3000 hits. Arguably the greatest Detroit Tiger hitter ever. That’s what he will be remembered for when he retires and yesterday he got a chance to be recognized not just by the Detroit Tigers but also by the entire baseball world. But what if I told you there was another player who had almost as many hits, and yet is not in the hall of fame, and won’t be remembered for his hitting at all? I’m talking about a baseball player who had in his career 2,715 hits, who was only about 1 and a half to 2 seasons away from hitting this milestone himself. He was a batting champion, he played in world series games and was a very talented player who isn’t remembered for his ability to hit and play the game at all. No, despite all of his stats and abilities, this player is remembered for one huge mistake, in the 1986 World Series between the Mets and the Red Sox when Bill Buckner stooped down to field a ground ball and it went through his legs. A 21 year career in the big leagues. 2,715 hits! But when people hear the name Bill Buckner, it’s the mistake that people think about.

We find a man who suffers a similar fate in our Gospel lesson for this the Second Sunday of Easter. What’s the first word that comes to your mind when I talk about “Thomas”? No doubt it’s what happened here recorded in John chapter 20. Easter night, remember it states that it was “the evening of that day” meaning that this is the very same evening of the day that Jesus rose from the dead, and they were all gathered together and Jesus appears to them. The apostles were all together except for Thomas. So when they tell Thomas about all that had happened this is his response. “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.” This becomes Thomas’s reputation. Doubting Thomas. What he’s most recognized for in the Scriptures and in our faith is his doubt. But on the altar at Trinity Onekama there is a symbol for Thomas. Something to remember him by. It’d probably be something about his doubting right? Like a skeptical face with a raised eyebrow. I mean St. Matthews is 3 money bags speaking about his time as a tax collector, it’s the thing we remember the most about him. But when you look for Thomas’s symbol you won’t find one reference to his doubting, or what happened in that room. Thomas’s symbol is a carpentry square over a spear. The carpentry square for his help building a church, and the spear that like so many other symbols of the apostles, tells how he was killed for the faith. Thomas was more than just a man who doubted, he was the one who asked Jesus, in John 14, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” to which Jesus responded, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And Thomas also showed his faith at the Death of Lazarus in John 11 saying, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Thomas was more than just his reputation or one bad moment. All that Thomas was asking for was what the other disciples had already received. Jesus appears to them in the room and says, “Peace be with you.” But then it says that He showed them his hands and his side. It’s only after being shown the marks of his death that they were glad to see him. And the entire Easter story is filled with disbelief and doubting. The women aren’t sure about what’s going on at the tomb. They tell the disciples who doubt their story and just last week we heard about how they saw it as an “idle tale.” These men who didn’t believe the women, now know the truth, and they are the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. Now they are the ones who are telling Thomas and he doesn’t believe them, but it’s in character with all that they have done this whole time. Jesus tells them of his death and resurrection in his ministry in many passion predictions and they don’t believe him. Disbelief is like a stench that lingers over all of them, but Thomas gets all the blame. It’s his reputation, but it’s really not fair. A whole life of service to God, and to Jesus, and to the church, and yet one mistake is all he’s remembered for. The ball went through Bill Buckner’s legs in 1986, and he retired in 1990. He kept playing, but every time he went to field a ball all anyone remembered was the mistake.

That’s the reality of sin, it’s a stain that can’t be removed or ignored, and we are always so quick to point out the reputations of others for their mistakes, to take the focus off of ourselves and point to someone else, because we are guilty of the same things. Thomas doubted, this we know is true, but so did the rest. And honestly, when you examine your heart, can you say you’ve never doubted the words of Holy Scripture? You’ve never had doubts about the resurrection of our Lord? Of the real presence of Jesus’ body and blood in the Lord’s Supper? There’s nothing in the Bible that has made you wonder if it’s really true? Like creation? The serpent speaking to Adam and Eve? Jonah and the fish? Daniel in the Lions den? Any of the miracles of Jesus? Nothing? Really? Honestly? These men were the ones who traveled with Jesus, ate with him, walked with him, talked with him, were with him 24 hours of the day, and yet they doubted. We doubt too. We are raised to be skeptical, doubting isn’t always such a bad thing, if you clicked on every link that said you won money on the internet you’d be broke from scams and lies. If you listened to everything strangers said on the telephone you’d be in deep trouble. The world is out to get you, you have to doubt, be skeptical, there is so much misinformation in our world today and we don’t know who to believe. Can I trust that news report to not be biased and one sided? What actually happened? How can I know? Where do I go for the truth?

Isn’t that what Thomas was asking in his life? “Lord we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Thomas’s question points us to the answer to any and all doubts. Thomas wants to put his finger in the marks of his hands and put his hand in Jesus side, and what happens? Jesus appears to them all eight days later and this time Thomas is with them, he gives them the same declaration of peace and then walks right over to Thomas and says to him, “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 has doubts, and receives the facts, the truth, the very body of Jesus in front of him to destroy any doubt. You have doubts. I have doubts. Sin creates doubt. Doubt isn’t some kind of dirty little secret that we have to hide, we are all sinners and our sinful flesh will doubt, Satan will tempt us to doubt, Doubts and disbelief plagued the disciples and they plague us too. But the difference is that rather than doubting and seeking answers and assurance out there, where the scammers and liars and manipulators of the world will push you further into that doubt and a full blown unbelief, we come here to God’s house and in the same way that Thomas did, get the answers from Jesus himself. You touch Christ with your hands, when you kneel at the altar and receive his very body. You taste Christ with your lips, when you drink of his blood under the wine in this Holy Sacrament, instituted by Jesus Christ for you. Thomas needed to touch him to believe, and you receive the same courtesy, because Jesus for Thomas wasn’t just a ghost or something undefined that he had to hear about and was not able to touch. You touch him, you taste him, the same resurrected Lord, miraculously appearing to you, in with and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. Let your doubts be drowned in the blood of Jesus Christ so that you may go forward to serve the Lord all the days of your life, as Thomas did, giving the solid declaration “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas was blessed to see His Lord and His God in person, to touch him and speak to him, and while we get to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ in this Sacrament, we are the ones that Christ spoke of to Thomas. “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We see in a small part, a piece of the puzzle, and it is enough, but we look forward to the day when Christ appears to us, whether in His glorious return or when we go to be with Him. It is a beautiful image in the words of verse 3 of the hymn, “Let Us Ever walk with Jesus” where we see how death can be seen not as the end but really just the beginning. We sing, “Let us mortify all passions that would lead us into sin.” Here talking about putting to death the temptations of our lives which can even include doubting, giving into a world of skepticism and doubt which leads to full blown unbelief, but here it is, words of comfort and just flipping death on it’s head which is really what Easter is all about, “And the grave that shuts us in……shall but prove the gate to heaven….Jesus here with you I die….there to live with you on high.” The grave as the gate. For Thomas he wanted to see the proof and it was no different for the other disciples and for us, gathered here today, we see our own proof in the body and blood of Jesus given for us to eat and drink in the Lord’s Supper. We hear the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in His Holy Word that speaks to us in the same way that he spoke to the disciples after his resurrection as they remembered His Words and as he continued to be with them and speak to them. But the final proof is the grave. Because when we leave this world and when the grave seems to shut us in the reality is that the grave is but the gate to the place, where we will put our fingers in the marks of his hands. Where we will put our hand in his side. Where the marks of our crucified Lord will be seen and where we will know with full confidence what Thomas and the other disciples knew in that room. Christ is Risen! And there will be no doubt about it.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.