



## Sermon

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The other day, I was reading an article about 9/11. I began to reflect on that day. I was sitting in my office juggling filling out visas for Jakarta and Abu Dhabi for our new offices there and helping with other IT needs for all of our employees around the world. I remember first hearing about it from a person from Alberta Canada. I was like what? No Way! Then another from Russia said the same thing? Can this be happening? Finally, our representative from Abu Dhabi said it's on TV and the radio.

We all went to the conference room to see horrific events unfold. Even seeing it, it was hard to believe. First, it was one plane, then two. Then, holy cow, is Pittsburgh under attack? We began getting notices of evacuation. All of a sudden there was so much information, so much confusion on what to believe and what not to believe. I don't think that anyone is going to

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attack Pittsburgh, but I can't imagine any of the events of that day. Do you bet your life on foolish decisions? I decided to leave—and go to lunch to ponder these things.

Our Gospel passage has confusion in two ways. First, the trouble mentioned at the beginning of the journey on verse 19. Second, how this passage is constructed can be confusing as well.

This passage starts with confusion, but then Jesus comes and enters saying, “Shalom,” then Commissions the disciples followed by breathing the Holy Spirit upon them and a confusion statement about forgiveness. The second part of this passage shows Thomas going from disbelief to belief with one of the most powerful statements in the Bible, “*My Lord and My God.*” Jesus then gives us a beatitude of blessed are those who come to believe through faith and not by seeing or feeling. Verse 31 sums up the whole passage: “These things are written that we may believe and have eternal life.”

Now back to our disciples at verse 19. I cannot help but think about the disciples after Jesus' death. Because we put these first Christians on such a high pedestal, we forget how much disbelief they had after Jesus' crucifixion. We also forget about the “ground zero” confusion of the times. They were not going to jump on board with a belief quickly; they were not 100 percent ready to bet their lives on it. It took seeing Jesus for them to become 100 percent convinced and ready to witness for Him.

Easter was a week away, and we can quickly lose focus that the start of our Gospel passage this morning, was an evening of Easter. Fear abounded, to the disciple's risk going outside, fear that they may have miscalculated the belief in Jesus. Fear that they have sinned against God. Moreover, very fearful that they will walk out and be noticed and executed. It was not until Jesus appeared and gave them the traditional greeting. *Peace be with you*, but they felt it so much more. They realized, it was Jesus, they saw with their eyes and believed. **THEY REJOICED!** That *peace be with you* or Shalom, means completeness. They realized that they were in the presence of the Risen Lord. That Shalom means all is well and in the way, it ought to be.

The passage continues immediately with the disciples being commissioned. Other Gospels have a great commission after Pentecost. In John, it is essential to know that the purpose statement of John is Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The selected messianic signs are for us to realize the importance of believing in Jesus is for the gift of eternal life. The commission is for the disciples to carry out Jesus' messianic message and to bear witness to His Word.

Jesus breathed on them the Holy Spirit. Oh, wait, Pentecost! Luke, for example, has the Pentecost on the Jewish Pentecost 50 days later. It's important here, not to try to put one Gospel against another to try to find which is most accurate. We must work hard not to seek to merge the Gospels to create a timeline. To do so, will make us

lose what is truly important, and miss what each evangelist is saying to us.

The Holy Spirit being breathed upon them is the fulfillment what was stated in John 1:33 that John the Baptist, baptizes in water, but Jesus will Baptize in the Holy Spirit. That Jesus has full authority to give God's Spirit. It is incredible to note the Trinitarian statement that all of the Godhead is present. The true unity of God's Word and God's purpose for us. The parallel between the baptism and them being breathed on is no coincidence. This passage is like what we experience at our confirmation when we affirm our beliefs. In confirming our expectations, we are reconciled to God and have life everlasting.

Jesus in this passage does one more thing. Ask us about forgiving sins. What? This is definably one of the most misused verses of the Gospel. To understand this, we must understand sin in John. For John, sin is not a moralistic do's and don'ts. Rather, sin is unbelief. We are disbelieving in God and his message.

Bringing people to forgiveness is bringing them to see and believe, so that they, too, may have eternal life. That is our mission today, to bring belief to people in this world who disbelieve by bearing witness to our faith.

It is fun to hear about Thomas in his disbelief. However, in reality, all the disciples had doubt until they saw Jesus. Then the most powerful statement in John's

Gospel was said by Thomas -- *My Lord and My God*. A true confession of faith. He believes.

Following our story, Jesus then gives a beatitude of blessed are those who believe who do not see. Unlike Luke's Gospel, everyone came from disbelief to belief, through a message. In John's gospel, we have an understanding as well. The blessing or beatitude is for us that we also have the Holy Spirit and the words and testimony of those who did notice as well.

AMEN, Alleluia!

Fr. Jeff+