

Easter 2 / April 11, 2021

John 20:30-31

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Have you ever missed a meeting, by accident or deliberately? Some people routinely skip meetings for the flimsiest of reasons, because they don't like meetings. Other people are so worried about missing something important that they attend staff meetings, even if they fall on their days off. Have you ever missed a meeting, only to learn that something important had happened? There are meetings and there are meetings. Thomas missed the most important meeting in history, in which the risen Lord appeared to the 10 disciples as they hid in fear behind locked doors. In his defense, Thomas didn't know there was going to be a meeting. There was no interoffice memo. The disciples were gathered not to meet the Lord, but in fear of arrest by the authorities. There was no order or agenda to their meeting, just consternation and confusion. But, then Jesus appeared and brought order to their meeting. He did two very important things at this meeting: First, He showed Himself alive. Second, He gave them the Holy Spirit and His authority to forgive sins, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven.”

If you miss a meeting, you can always read the minutes to find out what happened. Thomas missed the meeting, but he got the minutes. The others found him and told him, “We have seen the Lord.” It's one thing to miss a meeting, its another to claim the minutes are made up. Thomas refused to believe the witness of the other ten disciples. He wasn't alone in his initial unbelief. Jesus upbraided the disciples and the larger group of His followers for “their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.” He chastised them for not believing His words and all that the prophets had said concerning the Christ that He must suffer, die and rise on the third day. Thomas' unbelief stands apart, because He is so intransigent in the face of the testimony of His ten co-workers. He refuses to believe unless he also touches and sees. When he does see, he is singled out for rebuke by Jesus, saying, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” If you miss the meeting don't dispute what happened at the meeting.

It was necessary that some people saw Jesus risen from the dead. A matter was considered factual and legally verified, if it was witnessed and publicly attested to by two or three people. Jesus fulfilled the law with His sinless life. Jesus paid our debt of sin under the law, through His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus showed Himself alive to His closest disciples and to hundreds of His followers, in the forty days after His resurrection. Their witness legally verified His resurrection. They saw and believed, but God wants us to believe. God values nothing more highly than faith. Abraham believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. The author of Hebrews says that without faith it is impossible to please God. God wants us to take His word, spoken through these witnesses, to heart. He wants us to believe on the basis of His word. Jesus said to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John says to us, “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God that believing you may have life in His name.”

When Jesus appeared to the disciples, His first words were, “Peace be with you.” His words addressed the shock of His appearance, and spoke to the fear they were feeling in regard to the authorities and to the confusion of their thoughts at the experience of His dying. He wasn't saying ‘hello’ and using the word peace simply as a greeting. He was blessing them with the effect of His dying. He was speaking to them the eternal promise of His rising. His dying effected a change in the divine/human relationship. He had made peace between God and human beings, by taking away the guilt of human sin, through the blood of His cross. His first words to the disciples who had forsaken Him in the garden and who had refused to believe the witness of the women who had seen Him alive after His resurrection, were words of forgiveness, “Peace be with you.” Peace comes from a good relationship with God, based on the forgiveness sins. Jesus wants us to believe He is risen from the dead. Jesus wants us to believe His power to forgive and that in Him we have forgiveness and peace.

Having blessed them with peace by showing Himself alive and assuring them of forgiveness, He commissioned them to speak words of peace and forgiveness to others in His stead. He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” The Father sent Him into the world, not to condemn, but to save the world through Him. Jesus saved the world, by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, so that whoever believes in Him, in the whole wide

world, would have forgiveness, the peace of a good relationship with God in time and life with Him for eternity. Jesus sent the disciples into the world as His apostles, His personal representatives, to testify to His resurrection and to witness to His salvation, by proclaiming forgiveness in His Name, in the promise that everyone who calls on His name will be saved. In the witness and words of the apostles, His chosen representatives, we have peace in the assurance that our sins are forgiven!

John concludes the twentieth chapter of his gospel saying, “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.” He sums up the purpose of his gospel saying, “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name.” Neither John nor any of the evangelists were attempting to author a definitive, absolute, chronological biography of Jesus’ life. He and the others were writing for the purpose that we would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed heir of David, to whom God promised a kingdom that would never end. They wrote so that we would believe and see that Jesus founded God’s kingdom on the altar of His cross. They wrote so we would see that He establishes God’s kingdom, His righteous reign, in the hearts of those who take His words to heart and believe in Him.

John and his fellow evangelists wrote for the purpose that we would believe and see that more than a prophet, more than a righteous man that Jesus is the divine Son of God; begotten from eternity, through whom God makes Himself known as our Saviour from sin, the devil and eternal death. John wrote at the start of his gospel, “But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” They wrote, so we would believe and become children of God. They wrote, so we would have the assurance of salvation in the forgiveness of our sin. They wrote, so that we would believe that Jesus atoned for human sin through the blood of His cross and offers the peace of forgiveness for all to receive as a free gift of grace. They wrote, so we would believe God gives the grace of forgiveness freely and without limit, to all who believe. They wrote, so that we would have the peace of forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life, by believing in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

God values nothing more highly in a human being than faith. St. John wrote these things, so that we would have faith in Jesus as Saviour. St. Paul said, “faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.” The word of Christ is the good news of forgiveness, received through faith in Him. St. John said that Jesus did so many other things that “were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” More books have been written about Jesus of Nazareth than about any other human being. Books have been written about His infancy, His childhood and early adulthood. Books have been written about His travels, His relationship with His mother Mary, His father Joseph. Books have explored His social activism, His sense of justice and His personal psychology. Other people in antiquity wrote gospels about Him, supposedly even Thomas.

But the books that matter the most, the books that really matter are those that speak of Him as the Son of God and show Him to be our Saviour. Jesus did many things. He learned to be a carpenter and worked with wood and stone. It’s interesting to wonder where He worked and if any building projects still survive. Many things are interesting about Jesus, but only one thing is needful that we believe that He is the Christ the Son of God, our Saviour! What is most important is that we join Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus and sit at His feet and listen to His words. He has the words of eternal life. All who listen to His words and believe in their hearts, have forgiveness and life in His Name. God bless us with ears that listen to His words and with hearts that believe in Him. In Jesus’ Name. Amen