

John 20: 19-31 (NRSV)

- 19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
- 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
- 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
- 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.
- 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
- 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."
- 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
- 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."
- 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
- 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."
- 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.
- 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

My Lord and My God !

I remember the first time that I preached a sermon in English.

That was on August 9, 2015. The senior pastor was on vacation for two weeks, so they brought in a guest preacher for one week, and I did the other week. I was still a seminarian at that time, and my English was much less than it is now.

After my first sermon, I had an opportunity during the fellowship time to hear feedback about my preaching. The members church members encouraged me and said I did a good job. But I did not believe what they said. I was still frustrated even though the members encouraged me.

In the midst of that time, I remember one comment that Mr. Raymond (who is now in glory) mentioned to me.

“No worry, my son; everyone and everything is growing; you are growing toward a good preacher, too, and that's fine. This is your first time, and you did a good job.”

Despite my dissatisfaction with how I preached, Mr. Raymond's comment stuck in my mind, ... “I am growing.” and I realized that some people are supporting me.

Language is an interesting thing.

Learning a foreign language is very interesting, and it can be encouraging or discouraging, depending on how the person you are speaking to responds and reacts to your words. When someone encourages you, even if you're not good at what you tried to do, you will have the strength to work harder and get better.

Because you learn to speak by making mistakes, that spirit comes from encouragement, support, and caring for others.

You make mistake after mistake about pronunciation. You need to correct grammar. You need to correct your expression and culture. But through mistakes and practice, people grow, because someone takes care of them and their speaking, especially if the language is a second language.

Through repeated correction, a person's skill in the new language will improve more and more, because someone takes care to help that person.

That was what I learned when I learned Spanish and English. So, when I speak Spanish or English, my feelings are quite different from when I speak Korean. That's a very interesting thing that comes up in my mind. Have you ever felt that?

I think faith in God is also similar to learning a language, because faith grows out of consistent encouragement, caring, nurturing, and consolation.

The disciples who accompanied Jesus in His ministry were often rebuked and criticized by Jesus, but they tried to stay with Him to the end. Even if they didn't make it to the cross with him, they followed him as best they could under the circumstances.

We see that the attitude of the risen Lord is much changed from what it was before. Jesus is no longer scolding or criticizing his disciples, and we see him giving them faith and encouraging them. This is very interesting.

I think it's good to think of Jesus' coming to his disciples, as we see today's gospel reading.

The resurrected Jesus offers encouragement, love, and an invitation to his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and minister together. The disciples would have been very unfamiliar with the resurrected Jesus. So they must have been very confused as they looked at him. Seeing Jesus, the Master they loved so much, there must have been confusion and fear about their identity as well. Still, they must have been afraid in front of the Jews and the crowds. In the meantime, they stuck with Jesus even when the religious leaders came and persecuted them. Even if the religious leaders thought Jesus was wrong, the disciples thought Jesus' way was right and followed it. Even if there were death threats and fear, they overcame all of that by staying with Jesus.

After Jesus died, the disciples thought he had been removed from their lives. Without him, they find themselves surrounded by people who hate and dislike them. The same people who killed Jesus would probably come after the disciples, too. So, they went into hiding. They no longer had someone like Jesus to give them encouragement, support, direction, and motivation.

But then Mary Magdalene told them about Jesus' resurrection. They didn't seem to believe Mary's testimony. As always, the disciples' faith was lacking. The disciples were still afraid of the Jews. And they closed the doors of the place where they were gathered. I think we can understand that as hiding.

Then Jesus came to them. Jesus was with them and greeted them with a greeting of "peace."

Why did Jesus greet them with peace? I think it's because they didn't have peace. They were full of fear. To those disciples, Jesus shares peace and comfort. Jesus encouraged them with His love and peace. And he talks about receiving forgiveness of sins through the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, Thomas wasn't there.

The disciples told Thomas that they had met the risen Jesus. However, Thomas has the same reaction as Jesus' disciples. The disciples tell him about Jesus' resurrection, and he says that he won't believe until he touches Jesus' side and hands. Eight days later, Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas again. The symbolic significance of eight days is that it symbolizes resurrection, but it also refers to the beginning of creation.

Then Jesus appears to Thomas and invites him to touch his side and his hands. When Thomas sees that the Master he loved so much, Jesus, has come and announced his resurrection, he confesses, "My Lord and my God!"

To me, this expression is beautiful.

Now, for the first time, Thomas realizes that Jesus is his Lord and that he is God.

In a place where they had been cowardly and full of fear, Jesus comes and gives them courage.

It was a validation that everything he had been taught by Jesus was right.

God's resurrection of Jesus was also an affirmation that Jesus' work was right in God's sight.

At the same time, Jesus' resurrection revealed to the disciples that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and God alone. Thomas was the first disciple to confess to Jesus after His rising.

Now they're no longer hiding from others.

No longer hiding in the shadows, they rose up and boldly faced the world.

With Jesus, their Lord and God, with them, they were no longer afraid.

No longer afraid of the Jews, they boldly proclaim Jesus' resurrection and live their lives that Jesus taught them.

Do you remember the first time you used language to communicate with someone?

Think about the people who listened to your every word, who heard you, who encouraged you, who gave you strength and support.

“Yeah, you're doing good, you're doing good!”

Today, the Risen Lord comes to the disciples, shows Himself to them, and tells them to look to Jesus, who doesn't blame them for their lack of courage, but encourages them and embraces them with love.

Who are the people cheering you on? Remember, the Lord is at the end of it all.

Are you afraid when you start something new? Remember, Jesus is on your side, cheering you on, encouraging you, and those who are with Him will be on your side, cheering you on, too.

I believe that Jesus is with you and me in this amazing event, the one who showed those who were afraid, who thought death was the end, that death is a new beginning.

The Lord is my Lord, not just Thomas' Lord. God is not just the disciples' God, but our God.

May this bold courage restore all of us in our grief and despair. And may it be you and me who share this bold courage with those who need it.

Let us Pray.

The risen Lord, who does not blame the disciples for their unbelief, but comes to them and embraces them with love,

may you come to us, too, to comfort and strengthen us.

May he come especially to us, the saints, and let us know that he is with us.

May we, too, go to those who need you and live as witnesses to the Gospel.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!