

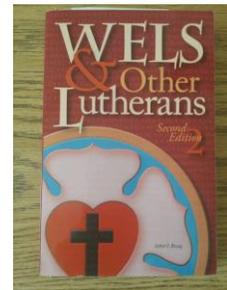
Dear Believers in the Real Resurrection of Christ,

Thomas seems like an odd ball to us. How could he not believe in the face of the evidence and the eye witness testimony of the other apostles and disciples? Sadly, Thomas is not alone.

On July 31, 2002 Jonathan Petre, Religion Correspondent for the British news outlet, *The Telegraph* published the results of a survey. He reports, “A third of Church of England clergy doubt or disbelieve in the physical Resurrection and only half are convinced of the truth of the Virgin birth, according to a new survey.”

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1403106/One-third-of-clergy-do-not-believe-in-the-Resurrection.html>

In 2010 Doctor and Pastor John Brug of the WELS in the book *WELS and Other Lutherans* documents on page 141 that there are serious doubts about the physical resurrection of Christ among the pastors and leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. His exact words are, “a resurrection that has historical reality only in the minds of the witnesses.” It means that the Easter disciples thought Jesus physically rose, but that was not really the case.



The examples I quoted are of those who call themselves Christians. I haven't even mentioned secular minded people and pagans who of course do not believe in the resurrection of Christ.

We live in a world where the majority of people do not believe in Christ's resurrection. So, it is important that we Christians who do believe, are strengthened in our faith by the inspired words of St. John in his 20<sup>th</sup> chapter. Again, today we hear: **The Easter Gospel Proclaims: See and Believe!**

### **1. This message gives us certainty and peace. (19-23)**

The disciples had received news through the women at the tomb that Jesus was alive. However, they did not believe the news. The disciples were left with uncertainty, fear and in one case, unbelief. That all changes when Jesus appears Easter evening. The disciples have certainty and peace. Jesus does not appear directly to us, however, through the Good News message about

this event give us certainty and peace.

A. Why do you and I need the certainty that the Gospels provide?

1. Like an experienced lawyer, St. Paul lays out the case for us. In 1 Corinthians 15 he reasons, **“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”** (16-18) He points out if Jesus has not risen from the dead, then you and I will not rise. Then we are all lost for eternity.

2. St. John assures us that Jesus is alive. He and the other apostles saw Jesus in the room Easter Sunday. They not only saw him, but they saw the wounds in his hands and side. We can imagine that some of them touched the scars as Thomas would later. There was no doubt. They were overjoyed.

Jesus has risen. What does it mean?

B. Jesus first words to his disciples were, **“Peace be with you!”** This peace has many applications to our lives.

1. St. Peter tells us in Acts 3 that we have forgiveness of sins. **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. (19-20)** The doors to the room were locked for fear of the Jews. The disciples were also afraid of what Jesus might say, because they had abandoned him in his hour of suffering. Jesus’ resurrection meant their sins were forgiven. He tells them as much.

How refreshing it was for them to hear that every sin had been paid for by Jesus. You and I have had every sin buried in the grave with Jesus. When he rose to a new life we, disciples have a new life in him. This is the peace that he gives.

2. The peace and life Jesus offers, extends beyond this life. Jesus promises peace and life for all eternity. Remember Jesus’ words to Martha. **“25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”** (John 11:25,26) Jesus’ words to us, **“Peace be with you!”** offer the same thing. Jesus’ resurrection is of the greatest importance to you and me and all people.

C. As a result Jesus speaks of sending his disciples with this Good News message. He also tells them something about delivering the message.

**“Again, Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am**

**sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” (21-23)**

The key to their ministry is forgiving sins. The forgiveness of sins from the living Jesus grants peace and life. When a pastor or Christian says, “*I forgive you your sins in the name of Jesus or in the name of the Trinity,*” that is valid in front of Jesus. It is real. His resurrection guarantees it.

This is not necessarily easy or simple and so Jesus promises the help of the Holy Spirit. He will guide them. There will be moments when people are not sorry or repentant over their sins. We can’t just sin and in a callous way ask for forgiveness. We need to be sorry. This means that we wish we hadn’t done it. We don’t want to do it again. If someone is not truly repentant, we bind the person’s sins to them. They remain in their sin and guilt. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we seek to do what our loving Savior commands.

## **2. This message give us faith. (24-31)**

John 20 highlights another difficulty that we run into when sharing the Easter Gospel. Some people don’t believe that Jesus rose from the dead. How is that you and I believe? Let’s learn the answer as Jesus confronts the Apostle Thomas.

A. Thomas received a special blessing the week after Easter. Jesus ends up saying that you and I are even more blessed.

1. After Easter evening Thomas was told by the other apostles that they had seen Jesus alive. Thomas would not believe the evidence of the empty tomb or the report from the apostles. He said that unless he physically touched Jesus scars, he would not believe.

Jesus was in no way obligated to appear to Thomas. From everything we know, Jesus did not appear to his enemies or any unbelievers. However, a week after his Easter appearance, Jesus appears to the apostles and to Thomas. Jesus graciously invites Thomas to touch his scars and to put away his doubts.

2. Thomas gives a faith filled confession, “**My Lord and my God!**” Thomas not only believes Jesus is alive. He confesses that Jesus is the Master of his life and holds the position of God. We need to remember that we are not only confessing after Easter that Jesus is alive. We too confess that he is our

Master and the divine being who holds all power and control over us and our world.

3. Jesus makes an important distinction between those Easter disciples and us. He says, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Most believers in history do not get to see Jesus in person on earth. St. Paul was the only new person that Scripture acknowledges Jesus appeared to. You and I are blessed along with many other believers who have not seen Jesus and yet have believed. Our faith comes from hearing. We see Jesus through the word of Scripture.

B. St. John comments that the words of his Gospel and Scripture were written so that we would believe and have life in Jesus.

1. John tells us that many other miracles were done by Jesus, but they were not written down. We might think it would be fun to know some of these things. What God wants us to know is that Jesus is the Son of God and the one who saved us by dying for our sins and rising again. God wants us to know and believe this.

2. The wonderful thing is that the word, specifically the Good News, creates faith. The word causes us to believe and have life. Jesus teaches us in John 6:63, **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.”** The Holy Spirit uses his word to create faith in us and sustain faith. As we share the word he will work on others.

C. There are book lists for people who are looking for something to read this summer. I want to encourage you to take time to read parts of the Bible. There are easier parts. If you want to be challenged, there are harder parts. In the end, the Bible is all about Jesus and he is all about forgiveness and life. It is the best and most positive reading you will do all summer.

Conclusion: I think that many of us think we would have enjoyed being in that room with the disciples and seeing Jesus. I think St. John teaches us that even if you were there, you would have to understand and believe what you were seeing. The only way to really do that is to understand what Scripture had promised about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Today the **Easter Gospel still proclaims: See and Believe!** We believe what the Scriptures say about Jesus and our life, death and resurrection. We have forgiveness and life in him. Believe it and share it! Amen.