

“MORE THAN A NAME”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: JOHN 20:19-31

GOD’S WORD: 1 PETER 1:3-9

I – 1 PETER/ TROUBLE:

Pastor Becky and I had worked ahead to give a general idea of what our messages would be through the end of April. That way we could give the information to our worship committee to plan choir anthems, bell music, God’s little angel choir, church décor, power point slides, and everything else that goes into a normal Sunday service. So this message was already laid out with Scripture and theme before we faced the present pandemic circumstances that have us worshipping together via electronics for the present time.

But I looked again at God’s Word from 1st Peter I was struck by how appropriate to the present day it was. It’s a wonderful message to follow Easter and in it Peter talks about the ***“wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.”*** We are certainly facing one of those trials right now aren’t we? Our country had now surpassed the other places in the world with the number of those who have died from Covid-19. We are supposed to stay away from others. Our shopping is now done on line and picked up or delivered. When we do go out in public we are supposed to wear a face mask to protect ourselves from the germs of others, and them from ours. Millions of people are out of work and sitting at home without pay because the unemployment process is overwhelmed and can’t process the massive numbers. Restaurants are going out of business and stimulus checks are lagging behind in delivery and won’t be enough to help people until this is over.

So where’s the joy Peter promises us?

II – 1 PETER / AHEAD:

The passage say’s it’s ahead of us! We just have to look forward instead of backwards or at the present. We know that the sheltering in place, social distancing, masks, and hand washing has slowed the virus here. Ohio has drastically cut its predictions of how many new cases and deaths would be coming each day. We are sitting around praying and waiting for the day when things can get back to normal. When we can all come here and see one another again and worship with our faith family.

The Apostle Peter is telling us this is the same with any trials or trouble. We need to look ahead and see what's coming for Christians. He is very adamant that Easter meant something to all of us. That we should ***"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation,"***. It is by putting everything into perspective that we can have joy and praise God. It is by comparing everything that happens to us against what's going to happen to us. That regardless of this life, our next life will be glorious. Will be eternal. Will be without any kind of troubles.

So how can you do this? How can you have this peace and joy? It comes from that word "FAITH." It's by believing in the Easter story. Even though you weren't there, even though you didn't see the empty tomb or the empty grave clothes. Even though you didn't see with your own eyes you believe in the resurrection. Peter, who did witness it, says: ***You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. ⁹The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.***

III – TEXT:

That's the message I see in this morning's text. Listen again to the familiar story of "doubting Thomas" which concludes the Easter story that Pastor Becky began in the Gospel of John last Sunday...Easter Sunday.

John 20:19-31 (NLT)

¹⁹ That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. ²⁵ They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." ²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" ²⁸ "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

³⁰The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

It is still Easter. The disciples have had a rough three days. They had watched the man they loved. The one who had taught them so much. The one they had placed all their hope and trust in be arrested by those who led the church. He had been turned over to the Roman authorities where he was tried, beaten, and ultimately crucified. The majority of them had deserted him in his time of trial and the one who was the first to call him and accept him as the Messiah, the one who had said he would die with him, was now in shame because instead he had denied him when asked. Then to make matters worse they had gone to pay their respects and give his body the proper preparation they were unable to on Friday, but found his tomb empty and then were told by the women that he had risen from the dead. They would be full of questions and grief as they met together in a locked room for fear the Jewish leaders were not done with them yet and a similar fate awaited them.

Then suddenly Jesus appeared among them with the familiar greeting “peace be with you.” Without them asking he showed them the wounds he had suffered from his death on the cross. He then gave them some instructions, gave them the Holy Spirit, and put them to work. They would form the church. They would be the witnesses that give us all faith.

Then we get to Thomas. Thomas was not there that night and when they told him the story of what had happened, of what they had witnessed, he refused to believe it. He said he would have to see it for himself before he believed. A week later he got his chance. Jesus appeared again as they were locked in a room together. He specifically addressed Thomas and showed him the wounds too. Invited him to touch them so he knew they were real. And told him “***Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!***” And Thomas responded “***My Lord and my God.***”

And Jesus told him that he now believed because he had seen it with his own eyes. But how blessed would the people who never saw it, never witnessed any of it but still believed. He was talking about US!

IV – MORE THAN A NAME:

It was at that moment that Jesus became more than a name to Thomas. It was at that moment that Thomas came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, was the Messiah, that he had come to be the Savior of the world and enable everyone to be forgiven of their sins. It’s the moment that Thomas believed.

My question for you is “When did Jesus become more than just a name to you? When did you come to believe that he suffered everything he did just for you? That you are forgiven of your sins and share in the heavenly inheritance that is kept for you by God in heaven as Peter told us?”

The end of the Easter story tells us that Jesus did so much more than what’s contained in the Bible, but that we have been given this book (the Bible) so that we may believe **“that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.”**

Peter who wrote our Scripture this morning and John who wrote this morning’s Gospel were both disciples of Jesus Christ and have witnessed to you so you can believe. Do You?

V – FAITH:

Faith is closing your eyes and opening your heart. Then you can believe what you have not seen and Jesus becomes real. The tomb was empty so your heart can be full.

If you were here this morning we would have an altar call. But God knows more than I do and he knows there are those who would never come to the altar at the church because people are looking. But I also know that through his power, through the Holy Spirit, you can find faith this day right where you are. So whether you’re watching this on your computer or reading it in our letter I invite you to humble yourself right now. You can place your hands on the computer screen, on this letter, on your Bible or simply lift them to God in praise or fold them in prayer. Then pray with me:

O Lord I come to you having heard the witnesses tell of who you are and what you did for me. I come now knowing that you are more than just a name from history. Knowing that you are the Son of God who came and took away the sins of the world. I know that I am a sinner in need of more than just a name. A sinner who needs to have a Savior who will remove my sins and make me right with my Creator and Almighty Father in heaven. So at this very moment in time Lord I confess to you the sins I have committed, that weigh my soul down and keep me separated from you. I pray that the blood of Jesus covers those sins and removes their stain from my soul. At this moment in time I open my heart and invite you to enter for all of eternity. I pray Lord that you will never be just a name to me again, but will be the Lord of my life and help me to transform and live the way you want me to. O LORD – I BELIEVE!

And it’s in your mighty name I pray...AMEN