

The Amazing Grace of Christ

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Scripture: John 20:24-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.”

²⁶A 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.” ²⁷Then 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.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The Purpose of This Book [the book/Gospel of John that is]

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

If you followed closely the journey of Jesus’ life, especially taking time to draw closer to Jesus and his experiences and journey to the cross during what we call Holy Week, and of course leading to celebrating his resurrection on Easter, then you experienced some, if not quite a bit, of the ups and downs with Jesus and his disciples.

It was a total rollercoaster ride of emotions, mental strains, physical tests to the very limits, and of course spiritual tug-of-wars that looked like all was lost at one point.

And we will learn more later in a future sermon that it wasn’t all roses, blue skies, and happy trails after Jesus resurrected. In fact, though Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples would soon find out that their journey in following Jesus had really just begun. And even tougher was that Jesus eventually left and went to heaven until an unknown day and time when he will come again. Jesus said that he didn’t even know when he was going to return, though part of the triune God. God can do and be as God desires. And in the Holy Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, God the Father chooses to not let God the Son know when Jesus would come again. And until then followers of Jesus, especially during the early Church times, were terribly persecuted, and they would be for centuries.

Today, in light of what I just mentioned, the disciples had gone from the highs of being with Jesus, to the lows of seeing him arrested, beaten, spat upon, mocked, killed by a gruesome crucifixion, and left waiting in hiding in grief, fear, and total shock and confusion for three days before Jesus surprisingly and even more shockingly appears to them.

Though we are not going through such extreme grief and trauma the disciples went through when Jesus died and rose again, we can learn and take a lot from what happened and apply to what we're going through now. It was draining for all of them, no doubt.

And these times we are in now, we no doubt feel drained because we have suffered not only a sudden and surprising change in our lives, but one that is ongoing with no certainty with timing, short and long term.

So we are drained as we live in a different and difficult way. Sure there are some who say, don't make such a fuss since you have all you need and you are healthy and safe. There are others who are not so blessed. Yes, that is true. However, it is not that we are complaining in needless ways, but rather we must talk about our losses, our grief, our worries, our hurts, our fears, and all that go with this since just because someone has more of something than another, let's say money, that doesn't mean something like the grief of something or someone is less valid. It's like saying to someone who is financially secure they shouldn't complain or be sad when they have troubles in their lives or worse experience the loss and death of a loved one. That would be ridiculous. But how sometimes we are quick to judge and criticize someone who is grieving the loss of what some would not value since they are not going through it themselves.

My point is that we should not say to someone who is grieving the loss of a family vacation as if they are simply whining about their privileges. I think it sad when people take the time and energy crushing those who are already hurting, trying to make them feel worse for what they think they shouldn't feel.

Even when it seems ridiculous that a child may be complaining about something that to an adult or even another child as seemingly insignificant or ridiculous to be sad about, remember to put ourselves in their shoes to have some more empathy and care so to meet them where they are and need.

God did that for all of us. And God continues to do that for us. When people were worried about the things Jesus said not to worry about, such as what we would call necessary and needed things, like food, water, clothing, shelter, etc., and Jesus said to focus on God's will and God's kingdom.

Jesus was not trying to make us feel bad or worse, but rather to see what matters most. And when people may criticize our concerns as ridiculous, I do give the grace and say that they are trying to say focus on what is more important, such as Jesus did.

That helps. At the same time, as we go through the ups and downs of these times, we must know Jesus showed compassion, care, gentleness, and such love that was and continues to be the love of God.

We see all the dynamics of this as we revisit what happened when Jesus appeared to the disciples, and specifically to Thomas. This was a week after Jesus rose from the dead.

How does this relate to Jesus meeting Thomas and helping Thomas overcome his doubts? We all handle challenging times differently. And there are so many factors that can cause some of us to rise up and be the supportive and active person who gets what needs to get done. Then are times when it seems like the exact situation but because of some other factor that affects you just a certain way, you are the one in need of support and people to surround you with help since you can't seem to function as you normal would.

Thomas was not there when the other disciples saw Jesus. Thomas couldn't and wouldn't believe the words of his friends and fellow disciples. He insisted that he had to touch Jesus before he'd believe.

And when seeing Jesus, though Thomas said he believe, Jesus knew he had to touch to truly believe and made him do so.

Now I will say there are those who saw Jesus with their own eyes, but still would and could not believe. I cannot explain this, but the Bible tells us that sometimes, no matter how much you prove to someone that something is true, their minds will still refuse to believe it and make some reason up to make it so in their minds it's not true to them. Denial is one word for it.

Though it seems hard to understand, it happens more often than not. I have witnessed two people seeing two other people in a fight and one hit the other person. The two people witnessing it had completely different views of it. One cried out saying it was wrong to hit! The other person walked away and acted like it didn't happen and never acknowledged it as if it didn't happen, which for that person and in his mind, it did not.

That might seem crazy, but think about Thomas and him not believing until he saw Jesus and touched Jesus' wounds for himself.

But it's actually not. They all had experienced grief and trauma in seeing and knowing about Jesus going through all that he did with the journey to the cross and being dead for 3 days.

Last week I was able to joined a webinar on grief and trauma, as well as reading about it more, I have learned how even when we feel we aren't as active physically and though we are home more, we are surprised at how tired we may be when it seems like we don't have any reason for it.

However, during these uncertain, stressful, and I would say somewhat traumatic times, and yes for some much more traumatic than others, we all are experiencing losses, griefs, and trauma. And that wears on us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

We do have various fears, whether it's about others, ourselves, our communities, the entire world, how we will weather this, how our children will, how long this will be, whether it's about the stay-at-home order or until they find a vaccine. We know there are positives and benefits of what is happened with all the suffering and even loss of lives. We know that we are being changed for the better in various ways through this all. Yet we don't know what will come, how we'll be after experiencing this, and how others will be when we are start returning to more of the ways we used to work, play, and live.

During one of our virtual devotional meetings, someone made a good point about how with faith and God we can weather this storm well and have the ability to walk through such times, not only now but for the future, with more strength spiritually that will help with us mentally, emotionally, and even physically.

Instead of a incident that we know is over and can work on recovering from, this is ongoing and one we carry with us, even as we carry it well and better than others. The weight is still weight. And with no definite timeline, it definitely causes to feel worn at times with being confined and also journeying through this and feeling drained from the ups and downs.

On top of this is missing all the things we actually need, which is community, fellowship, and all that go with going to church and worshiping together, going out for family events, sports, meals, birthdays, weddings, births, and all the other activities as simple as watching little ones or caring for older ones. And on top of all that is when there are those hurting, in need, and even in the hospitals. Though I'm not shy about talking about it, I have not talked about it before a lot, but it's hard for those who have loved ones either with COVID-19 and are battling it, those who have been exposed due to someone else and have to stay away from home, and of course those who have passed away and the family cannot be there. This is hardest for the family members, as well as difficult for their friends, and including me as their pastor.

We're not allowed to do that which we normally do, and I would say need to do, it's no doubt difficult. Some things will have to wait. And there will be time to regather, to rebuilt, to celebrate as well as mourn together.

We all process it differently too, which can be draining when someone wants to not really talk about it or hear more about it, focusing on what they can do and not let other things drag them down. Then there are those who find such relief in talking about it until they feel they let off enough steam and whatever they needed to release. Then there are those in between and as well as more extreme on either end. And there is no right or wrong in how we feel and how we process.

Thus it is even more important to reach out when needed, to family, friends, and including me, your pastor. I cannot be there for you physically, but I can be there for you in prayer, by phone, video chat, through what I write, and of course these sermons and times of worship as I and others are able to provide.

So go to God in prayer, in journaling, in walking, or any way that allows you to express what you need to as well as to receive all God has to offer you through his Word, through the love of others, through what you see in nature, what you feel when you do all that you do and connect with those you can connect with.

Take time to look through our church directory and call and talk with those that you know could use a call or those you haven't talked to in a long time.

Along with these things, as God has given you, and continues to give you grace, take it and offer it to yourself. This will help during the times when you feel totally drained from the ups and downs of each and every day, especially during these times.

Jesus knows this about us. And Jesus knew this about his disciples, that they were drained from the ups and downs they had experienced in his death and resurrection. When Jesus knew that Thomas demanded that he touch Jesus' wounds before he believed, Jesus offered Thomas such amazing grace instead of scolding him or saying where his faith was and how he did so much and that his how Thomas reacted?

Jesus met Thomas where he was and helped him in his lack of faith and even demands for his faith to be met.

Offer that same grace for yourself, the grace of Jesus Christ as you walk through these times. Offer it to others when our patience seems to wear thin at times. We are all doing our best in these new ways of doing things.

Know when you allow for God's love and grace to shower over you, to see that Jesus knows and meets you where you are, and that he will take care of you no matter what happens in life and even in death, then you will find the renewal you need for each day, for each moment, and for all of life and every circumstance. And please remember that God works through each of you to offer such love and grace to those around you so they may be reminded and feel Christ's love and grace for themselves.

As Leah Corder from Parasol Wellness Collaborative wrote, let us also remember, "No guilt, only grace, as we walk this uncharted territory together."

May you feel the grace of Christ like Thomas did as we walk with Christ and each other in these times ahead. Amen.