

Let's get straight into the text:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,

The first day of the week is, of course, Sunday,
And the specific Sunday that is referred to here
Is the Sunday of the Resurrection.

So, we have John's telling of Jesus first appearing to his disciples
On the day of his resurrection.

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.'

The disciples, having seen their Lord arrested and crucified
Are afraid of those with the power to do the same to them.

They are joined together behind locked doors –
Behind doors locked because of their fear.

It is into this reality that Jesus appears
And his first words are not words of condemnation or reproach
But the declaration of peace.

It's worth pausing here and thinking about
How the Gospels portray the resurrection appearances of Jesus.

The empty tomb is portrayed as evident to all:

Those with faith, those without, all could see that the tomb was empty.

But the risen Christ was only seen by those with faith –
And even then, something other than his appearance
Needed to happen before they could come to trust.

So, earlier in John's Gospel Mary Magdalene
Thinks Jesus is the gardener until Jesus calls her by name.

In Luke's Gospel the two disciples on the road to Emmaus
Don't know who Jesus is until they see him

In the breaking of the bread.

In Matthew's Gospel, some the eleven are hesitating, or doubting,
Before Jesus gives the Great Commission.

Here in John, Jesus first gives his word of peace,
And then he shows who is

And by his presence and his word, the disciples see him.

This is what John writes: **After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.**

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

So, again we hear that seeing Jesus

Is not simple a matter of using your eyes

But listening with your ears – of receiving his word.

This is underlined by what happens next: **Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, **'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'**

Jesus repeats his declaration of peace,
And then he sends his disciples
With the same authority with which he himself has been sent,
Breathing on them the Holy Spirit –
The Spirit given to free people from their sin.

In our church services we regularly talk about the fact
That Christ gave his church the authority
To forgive the sins of those who repent
And to declare to those who do not repent
That their sins are not forgiven.
If you even wondered why we say such things, well,
This is one of Scriptures that talks about it.
Notice also that it is *Jesus, in his resurrection,*
Who gives his church authority to forgive sins in his name.
So, like Christian baptism, as we read about it in the Great Commission,
The authority to forgive sins is one of the resurrection gifts
Of Christ to his church.

But remember, when Christ gave this gift,
Not all of the disciples were there. Listen: **But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.'**

This is a true case of witnessing to the resurrected Christ.
We, who have received the Gospel *confess* the faith
But the first disciples were witnesses, not to their faith
But to the risen Christ.

Now you might think that when the first disciples acted as witnesses,
Especially to those whom they knew,
To those who themselves knew Jesus,
That their testimony would be received with trust and joy.

But this is not what we read – far from it: **But [Thomas] 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.'**

This is an emphatic statement of unbelief
And a setting of the highest standards of proof.
The Scriptures simply describe this response of Thomas,

And we hear nothing of the response of the other disciples.

Let's tune in to how the other disciples could have felt:

Perhaps offended that they were not believed;

Perhaps angry about Thomas's lack of trust;

Perhaps understanding – after all, they had been fearful;

Perhaps challenged – what *had* they seen in that encounter.

We don't, of course, know what the other disciples *felt*

Because it is not recorded in Scripture,

But we do know what they *did*

Because next Sunday they were together: **A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.**

A week later: that is, *next Sunday*.

In my opinion, a helpful way to think about this is:

Next week they were together at church.

Thomas, the great confessor of doubt,

Thomas, the one who demanded proof, was at church.

It seems to me this should give us pause

Whenever we want to react quickly and emotionally

To people who express their doubt or scepticism –

To fellow baptised people who express their doubt or scepticism.

It is one thing to speak, and another to *act*:

What do people *do*?

Thomas, in his doubt and scepticism *went to church*,

And it was there that he encountered the risen Christ.

Listen to what the text says: **Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'**

The same words that Jesus first said,

The words which we hear after the absolution,

The words which we hear after communion,

Were said to the disciples, and this time to Thomas.

And then Jesus brings Thomas to faith

By his appearance, by his declaration of peace,

By his word: **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.'**

Again, Jesus does not condemn or scold,

But comes to Thomas where he is, reveals himself as he is,

And by his word frees Thomas from doubt

And brings him to what seems to me

Is the strongest and clearest confession of faith in the Scriptures: **Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'**

Not, my teacher, or my sage, or my guide.

But my Lord and my God.

Now Listen to Jesus' response

Because there are words here of comfort and encouragement for us: **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.'**

This, you could, say, is the final beatitude that Jesus spoke.

Remember in Matthew's Gospel

That Jesus begins his teaching of his disciples with these words:

'Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God'?

Well, here we have a blessing spoken to us as disciples –

A final blessing spoken by the resurrected Christ,

That we who have not seen him, but who have come to believe

Are blessed by God.

Listen again to how this part of John ends: **Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.**

Here John makes it clear that he has not been writing a biography,

Or a scholar's account of Jesus' life.

Rather, he has been writing Jesus' word,

A word given so that we may believe in Jesus

And share in his risen life.

And this is how we receive the word in the church:

As people who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,

And that through his resurrection, we have life in his name.

And today we show our faith in the simplicity

Of coming together, and of coming forward

To receive the body and blood of Christ

For the forgiveness of our sins –

To see him in the breaking of the bread

And to be blessed as people who confess the faith.

In Jesus' name. Amen.