

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter Pastor Arndt

The other day I was digging through our family game closet and I came across a puzzle. I'm not a big fan of puzzles. Staring at hundreds of shapes trying to match every divot and curve... that isn't my idea of relaxation. Thankfully, God has a little more patience than I do. This Sunday is all about Jesus knowing your personal spiritual needs. Like a puzzle piece, you didn't choose to have so many curves and voids. But the good news is Jesus knows you and he choose HIS shape to be the perfect match you need.

Gospel Lesson – John 20: 19 - 31

**<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,<sup>[c]</sup> Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."<sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."**

**<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin,<sup>[d]</sup> was not with them when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."**

**<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

When I look at puzzle pieces... they remind me of people. It's not too often that you find a puzzle piece that's perfectly shaped and symmetrical. It's the same with us. We have holes and deformities. The result is we look something like this. (**puzzle piece**) One thing is for sure... no two of us are exactly alike.

As puzzle pieces, we don't *choose* our deformities. I don't think Thomas *chooses* to doubt. He can't help it. There's just a *hole* there in his life. As the drama of Easter unfolds, we find all sorts of voids and deformities as the world tries to cope with the reality of Christ. We're no different. We have our own mishappen ideas and flaws.

We don't choose our shapes. But thankfully, Jesus *does* choose his.

### I. He presents himself to us exactly as we need.

Thomas has a rather noticeable dent in his faith, doesn't he? He tells the disciples, "*I will never believe unless I can see him and touch him.*" Notice, he doesn't say that to Jesus. He says it to the disciples. But when Jesus appears, he knows what Thomas has been thinking. Before a word of protest comes from Thomas' lips... Jesus cuts him off at the pass. "*Reach out your hand... Touch my side.*"

*“Why would I need to do that?” Can you picture Thomas trying to hem and haw... and Jesus answering him? “Because you are the one who said, ‘unless I this and that I’ll never believe’.”*

Jesus exactly forms himself to the void in Thomas’ faith. *“So, you are the one who will not believe unless you reach out and touch? So be it... Reach out. Touch. Believe.”* And what the Word of God calls for, the power of God creates. Thomas cries out *“My Lord and my God!”* He Believes!

Jesus also knows you. You are the ones that Jesus is speaking of when he says to Thomas, *“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”* Your Savior knows the questions of your faith. With the same confidence with which he reaches out his hands to Thomas...

## **II. He reaches his hands out to you... through his word.**

Jesus really doesn’t do anything different when he reaches out to you. When you read the word of God, there is a consistent message that you hear. As Jesus appears to his disciples, he knows them... all of their dents, and deformities... and this is what he does... he shows them his hands and his feet. Fast forward 2000 years and the message of Jesus has not changed.

Perfectly wrapping himself around our sins he holds out his hands and side and says, *“peace be with you.”* These are not pretend wounds. Therefore, your peace is not a pretend peace.

Even here, Jesus is not done. He acknowledges the most significant hole in my spiritual puzzle. Luther put it this way, *“I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in this Word [Jesus] or come to him.”* Jesus acknowledges this. So, the Word is never given without the Holy Spirit. He breathes on us and says, *“receive the Holy Spirit.”* The Spirit takes that word and powerfully springs into action. What the word of God calls for, the power of God creates.

## **III. He chooses to need us**

But there is one last miracle in our lesson. Jesus takes us back to a puzzle—the puzzle of the church. There are holes (missing pieces) in the church. To our amazement God uses us to fill those voids. There is nothing that we can contribute to the church. But God molds and shapes us. Probably no one understood this better than the Apostle Paul who said, *“We preach Christ crucified!”*

God himself could speak to your neighbor, your co-worker, your spouse, your children. He could lift up his own voice and preach the wounds of Jesus. God, in fact, does speak this message to these people. The thing is, He uses *you* to do it! He *“chooses to need us”* and sends us into the world preaching the wounds of Christ.

Like I said, I’m not a fan of cardboard puzzles. Instead, when I look at puzzle pieces, I think of people. Thanks be to God, he perfectly forms himself to my deformities. Blessings be to you as God uses you perfectly formed pieces of his Church!

-Amen