

“Substantiate” Sermon for April 8, 2018, Acts 4:32-35, Psalm 133, 1 John 1:1-2:2, John 20:19-31

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” (John 20:26-27)

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When we have evidence to support or prove the truth of something, it has been substantiated. We substantiate Christ to the world when we becoming living proof of the truth of life over death. Thomas heard the witness of those who had seen Jesus. But he was not convinced. He needed the resurrection to be substantiated. Thomas loved Jesus as much as any of us do. But like us, he had other concerns. What were they to do? Would not the same forces that had orchestrated Jesus’s execution have an interest in detaining and questioning if not arresting them?

Perhaps he thought, "If I take this radical faith position, will this resurrected Jesus appear on my behalf? Will he substantiate my faith with his on-time appearance before my enemies?"

What enemies? We all have the same enemies: alienation, exclusion, fear, isolation, loneliness, participation in acts of greed and bigotry. Thomas was not so different from the other disciples. They were all afraid, uncertain of their future.

Fear prevents us from embracing what is possible in faith. Fear creates a lifelong addiction to never moving beyond what is "safe" and "sensible". Fear robs us of the opportunity to substantiate faith.

Jesus said to his disciples as he suddenly appeared before them in spite of the locked door, "Peace be with you." In spite of their fear of what the Jewish leaders would now do to them, the very one whom

they presumed to be a victim of those Jews, the very one whose words they had challenged and doubted, the very one whom they had hoped would be the one, yet who had died on a Roman cross, appeared before them. “Be at peace.”

He called on them to exercise faith in God’s deliverance from death, God’s resurrection to life. “See the holes in my hands where the nails had been. See the wound in my side where the sword pierced me, believe.” But he again said to them, “Be at peace. Just as God sent me, so I am now sending you (20:22-23).”

Then he breathed on them, “Receive my Holy Spirit.” In so doing Jesus was his granting them authority. Here, take my authority and substantiate my life in the world around you. “Whoever’s sins you forgive will be forgiven. Whoever sins you do not forgive will not be forgiven.” This apostolic authority is placed

upon those who continue to proclaim the kingdom of God in Jesus absence.

We use that authority, God's power to proclaim life over death, success over failure, community over isolation, and love over bigotry and selfishness. We substantiate the living resurrection, death has been defeated. That authority in our hands substantiates God's unconditional love for all human beings.

Accept Christ's peace and live in it. Allow Christ's power to begin its work in you. No one can stop us. No weapon designed against us can harm us. No one can claim what God has for us, nor rob us of it. It's time to substantiate our faith. Amen.