

*19When 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." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 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." 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.*

A photo ID. For now it takes a photo ID to vote and to get on an airplane and sometimes to cash a check at my bank. Fifteen years ago it just took my signature or a ticket but now a photo ID is required. In a world where we know one another less well we need more and more ways of proving who is who.

They knew Jesus. The men in that room knew him the way family members know one another. They had eaten together, traveled together, seen each other late at night and first thing in the morning. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Matthew, Bartholomew, James, Simon, Thaddeus these ten knew Jesus. But when he suddenly appeared to them in that locked room where they huddled in fear of the religious leaders it seems that they did not immediately recognize him. They heard his voice – saw him but it was only after he showed them his hands and his side that the disciples rejoiced. The marks of the nails, the mark of the spear were the proof that this was really Jesus.

I suppose he could have turned water into wine – or fed them with just a crumb of bread – surely they would have recognized Jesus had he worked some miracles for them there that evening. But instead he showed them the marks of his crucifixion and they believed.

This was not imposter – this was Jesus who laid down his life for his friends.

Thomas was not with the ten that evening when Jesus came to be among them. When the ten told him that they had seen Jesus Thomas did not believe. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thomas would not settle for a Jesus look alike – only the very same Jesus who had suffered would convince him.

Then a week later they were all together once more and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were closed, suddenly Jesus stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he greeted them. And then turning to Thomas he said, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not be without faith but believe.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God.”

There is a whole world of Thomases out there these days – people who are not hostile to Jesus but who just do not believe in him. They hear the words about Jesus – testimony that he is God’s Son – that he is the Savior – that he is Lord of all. But all these words from those who follow Jesus seem just words. They want more than words.

To his disciples Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me so I send you.” He breathed the Holy Spirit into them and gave them authority to forgive.

When you were baptized the same Holy Spirit and authority to forgive were breathed into you. When you were baptized you became a member of Christ’s own body in this world. When you were baptized you became one who is sent in the very same way Jesus was sent by the Father.

What today’s Thomases are looking for is the mark of the nails in your hands and mine - signs that we are loving in costly ways. Just as Thomas, the disciple, was looking for the marks of Jesus suffering before he would believe today's Thomases search for signs that the love of God is really evident in the living and service of those whom Jesus sends in our day. Not just words about love but costly deeds that reflect the costly love of Jesus.

On the eve of his crucifixion, our Lord gave a new commandment – that we should love one another just as he has loved us. Not just a love of the heart and mind but a love that offers our lives as our Lord offered his life.

For Thomas it was not enough just to hear about Jesus – even the witness of those Jesus and Thomas knew best convinced him. Thomas had to witness the marks of Jesus suffering.

It is good when we as a people of God gather in this room and our Lord comes to be among us as he promises. It is good when we hear his word of peace, when we share his body and blood given and shed for us. But it is not enough for us to be concerned only about ourselves. You and I are sent.

Over time we get a sense of those who bear the marks of the nails in their hands. This week some gave costly service to families without homes through Family of Promise, some delivered meals on wheels, some went the extra mile for someone at work or in the neighborhood. Now these sacrifices are not the same as the suffering of our Lord for his suffering brings the gift of eternal life for all who believe. But as you give yourselves in love Christ is still giving himself through his body. Thomases are helped to believe.

As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you. Amen.