

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

“After all the facts are presented and all the evidence put on display, there is only one reasonable conclusion to which you can come: Guilty!” This is the task of a good prosecutor. The prosecutor’s job is to lay out all the facts and present all the evidence which will leave every person on the jury to come to the only conclusion beyond any reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty of the crime. It’s hard to argue with the facts. People will try to do that. Defense lawyers will try to cast doubt on the evidence provided and call into question the facts presented. But a fact is a fact and can’t be disputed. Facts lead to certain conclusions.

Today, we are not here for a verdict but a confession. What a big day today is! We take it as a yearly tradition. We pull for the kids to make it through the exam. We gather as happy friends, parents, grandparents and look forward to this big step by our young people. But today is about much more than just memorizing answers to questions so that they can be answered properly in the service. It’s about more than completing the years of classes to get to this point. Today, these young people will make a confession that they see something that more than 2/3 of the world does not! They have had years of facts and evidence provided for them in the Bible. They have studied those passages of Scripture, considered the words written by the authors and through the eyes of faith have seen what you and I have seen: the risen and victorious Christ. They have seen the evidence and are ready to make the same confession of Thomas in our text for today: **My Lord and My God!** Today we celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit not only in the hearts of these young people but in the hearts of everyone who makes this confession. Let’s see the facts of Jesus’ resurrection laid out before us today that lead us to only one reasonable conclusion and confession: **My Lord and My God!**

**John 20:19-31** *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”* <sup>20</sup>*After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* <sup>21</sup>*Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* <sup>22</sup>*And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.* <sup>23</sup>*If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”* <sup>24</sup>*Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples 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 the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* <sup>26</sup>*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!”* <sup>27</sup>*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.”* <sup>28</sup>*Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”* <sup>29</sup>*Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* <sup>30</sup>*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* <sup>31</sup>*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

We have labeled Thomas as the doubter and given him the nickname of “Doubting Thomas.” But let’s not single him out. The other disciples had their doubts as well. They were hiding in the room behind locked doors full of fear and doubt. They didn’t know what had happened. They had heard rumors from their ladies that Jesus had risen from the dead but they hadn’t seen him yet with their own eyes. The Pharisees had charged that the disciples had stolen his body from the grave. They were afraid that the leaders might do to them what they had done to Jesus. Perhaps they were also afraid of the fact that Jesus might be alive. If that were the case, he might be upset with them for abandoning him as they did in the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday evening. They didn’t know what to think. They were all full of doubts and fears.

But then in his grace, Jesus appeared before them. The walls and doors could not keep out his resurrected body. It wasn’t a vision of Jesus they saw. It wasn’t his ghost. It was really him! He showed them the evidence they needed to know beyond a shadow of doubt that it was really him. They saw the nail holes in his hands and the place where the spear had been shoved into his side. It was really him and he was really alive! He brought with him the peace with which he greeted them. He wasn’t there to yell at them for abandoning him. He had given his life to rescue them from their sins and he wanted them to know the peace which he offered between them and their heavenly Father. He wasn’t there to judge or condemn them. He was there to assure them of their spiritual rescue from sin and death and encourage them with the certainty of eternal life he gave to them through faith.

Thomas wasn’t with them that night. When the other disciples excitedly told Thomas what they had seen, he replied with his famous answer: *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* The question is: was Thomas a doubter or a skeptic? Was it that he simply wouldn’t believe them and didn’t believe it was possible or was it that he just needed to see the evidence? The other disciples needed the physical evidence to know for certainty that it was really Jesus. This evidence which Jesus provided was the foundation of their joy. Skepticism is defined as: “to look at a matter closely, to scrutinize, to study with great care and intimate detail.” It is possible that Thomas wasn’t stubborn in his refusal to believe but just wanted to see the evidence for himself. While Thomas had no right to set any kinds of demands on Jesus, Jesus in his grace met them anyway. To banish all doubt from Thomas as he had the other disciples, Jesus appeared before him and presented the evidence that he needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus really had come back from the dead and was a living Savior. When Thomas saw

Jesus, with the holes in his hands and side, his response was one of worship and praise: **“My Lord and My God!”** What doubts he had turned to faith and he worshipped God.

God in his grace had the writers of Scripture write this down as evidence for you and me today. We don't have the luxury of seeing by sight the Lord Jesus. We see only through faith. But God provided all the evidence that we need. Not only do we have this account of the resurrection of Jesus with his physical presence to know for certain, we have all the other miracles and wonders Jesus did. From the changing of water into wine at Cana to the quieting the storms to the feeding of the 5,000 to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, all of these things were written down to give us the evidence needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is true God. God wants us to be skeptical—as the definition describes—to scrutinize and study the words of Scripture to know for ourselves who Jesus is and what he has done. He wants us to look at the matter of faith closely, to scrutinize to be sure we understand correctly and to study with great care and intimate detail. That's why we take time for Bible study each week and to dive deeply into a text in the sermon each week. That's why we offer a Bible Basics class for new members and why these children spend years in Catechism. When we study the scripture, we come only to one conclusion: **My Lord and My God!** God had John and the other writers of the Bible record what they did for one purpose: *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* This is the end game: Believing in Jesus as the Messiah so that we have life in his name. It isn't about how much you can memorize or how smart you can sound. It's about studying the Scriptures to know the eternal life that Jesus offers.

Too often in our skepticism, rather than accepting what Jesus offers to us, we look for him to prove himself in the way that we want. We want him to prove himself in windfalls where he showers on us more than we could want or use. We look for him to prove himself and his love to us by blessing us with earthly success and blessings beyond imagination. One commentator stated that we yearn for a carnival god, one who does dazzling stunts and slight of hand, and uses tricks and potions for quick, amazing cures. We like the God who fills the fish nets. But when these are the places we look for the evidence of faith, we are often disappointed. Life isn't always about windfalls and great success. There are not always quick cures to the many ailments we face. Trust in this God is shaky at best and certainly not absolute. In our stubborn, selfish pride we set our own standards for God to meet as proof that he lives and cares for us. This separates us from God and causes us to reject the evidence he provides, which also means rejecting our salvation.

God has provided all the evidence we need to have a sure and solid faith. The evidence which Thomas needed gives to us one more solid piece of evidence to preserve and sustain our faith. Jesus did rise from the grave. He is our Lord and Savior. God accepted the sacrifice which Jesus made for our sins. The doubts and selfish standards we set for God are forgiven in Jesus. We are saved from the damnation due us and certain of the promise Jesus made, “Because I live, you also will live.” How can we know for sure? Look at the lives these men lived after they saw Jesus alive. This Thomas upon whom we look down for his doubting traveled all the way to India to proclaim the resurrected Jesus. All of these Apostles died a martyr's death with the exception of John who died in exile on the island of Patmos because of his faith. If this were a made-up story kept secret by these men, would all of them to a person have stood so firmly in the face of persecution and death to keep this secret safe or is it possible that at least one of them would have cracked and given up the secret? Yet all of them, to a man, were willing to die for the Jesus they saw dead but alive again because of their confidence of the life that awaits. Thomas confessed, **“My Lord and My God”** and his life gave testimony to this confession.

Every one of us who have stepped forward at our confirmation, whether as 8<sup>th</sup> graders or as adults, have made this same confession. We publicly confessed Jesus to be God's son sent to this earth to be our Savior and then promised to be faithful to him and let him be the Lord of our life all the rest of the days of our lives. That's a strong confession. When you confess him to be your God, you are confessing him to be the God who rescued you from your sin. When you confess him to be your Lord, you are confessing to submit to him and let him rule over your life. You are confessing to his will and priorities before your own. You are saying that Jesus gets to call the shots of your life. He's the one who tells you what to think about yourself and marriage and the world. He's the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth. You are confessing that you are not an autonomous creature but live to serve him as your Master. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus is to believe it with boldness. You are saying that if he lives, then you can trust your entire life to him. Since he has raised from the dead, you are willing to spend your whole life following him and give your whole life to worshipping him.

This is the promise you made at your confirmation. This is the promise these young people make today. And this confession is of their own accord, sincerely and freely given. I always tell them, “I don't want you to believe this because I want you to or because your parents want you to. We do want you to believe this, don't get me wrong. But we want you to believe it because you have studied the scriptures yourselves and this is what you believe. We want you to believe it because you have scrutinized the evidence of Scripture and come away with the conviction: My Lord and my God! This is my Savior in whom I trust and whom I will follow all the days of my life.

We haven't seen the resurrected Jesus with our own eyes, but we believe. This is called faith. Through the evidence of Scripture we see the resurrected Jesus as our Savior and trust in his sacrifice as the payment for our sin. When you look at the evidence and study the facts, this is the only conclusion to which we can come—a conclusion of faith: **My Lord and My God.** May God keep you in that confession until he takes you home to heaven. Amen.