

# "Being There"

John 20:19-31

March 30, 2008

**There is a great little story that was entitled "Watch and You'll See". I suspect that some of you have read that story that involved a group of 6 people - three accountants and their three engineer friends. They were all traveling by train to a conference. The accountants bought three tickets, but were surprised when the engineers only bought one. "How are three people going to travel on only one ticket?" an accountant asked. "Watch and you'll see," said an engineer. They all boarded the train. The accountants took their seats, but the three engineers crammed into a restroom and closed the door behind them. The train departed the station and soon the conductor came through the car asking for tickets. He knocked on the restroom door and said, "Ticket, please." The door opened a crack and a single arm emerges with a ticket in hand. The conductor took it and moved on.**

**The accountants agree that this is a rather clever idea [no matter how strongly I would have objected] so after the conference, they decide to duplicate the engineers' feat. They bought only one ticket, but are astonished when they saw that the engineers did not buy any ticket at all! "How are you going to travel without a ticket?" the accountants ask. Watch and you'll see, reply the engineers. When they boarded the train, the accountants quickly crammed into a restroom with their one ticket and locked the door. Meanwhile, the three engineers did the same in a nearby restroom. After the train departed the station, one of the engineers left the restroom and walked over to the restroom where the accountants were hiding. He knocked on the door and said, "Ticket, please."**

**And then there is that other great story ..... ten guys crammed in a room with locked doors. There was no knock at the door but suddenly Jesus was in the room with them. Today's Gospel text contains the story of two of the resurrection appearances of Jesus following the events of that first Easter Sunday. What the disciples witnessed was nothing short of incredible. It was so clear that Jesus was dead and buried but now He stands with them inside a locked room. We hear the story and quickly turn our attention to Thomas and his doubts. We seldom even mention his bold comments earlier when he expressed his willingness to go and die with Lazareth - if that would have been what it took to support their friends family. We seldom mention his bold statement of faith that comes at the end of this Gospel text in which he proclaims Jesus to be both Lord and God - a proclamation that is never made more clearly in all of scripture. We read**

**the text and think almost exclusively about his expressions of doubt and his refusal to believe something that was beyond his ability to believe - it was, after all, humanly impossible. Seldom do we ever mention the doubts of the other disciples who refused to believe the women who came back from the tomb and told them that Jesus was raised from the dead and Luke tells us that it all seemed to those disciples as if it were an 'idle tale' and they refused to believe such nonsense.**

**Yes, it really is an incredible story - hiding out behind closed and locked doors. Had they not been there to watch and see, how much of it would any of those disciples have believed? Because they were there when Jesus came the first time, they had the privilege of hearing and seeing Jesus. Because they were there they had the privilege of seeing the wounded hands and side and hear Jesus say, "Peace be with you". Because they were there they could feel Jesus breath on them and impart the Holy Spirit.**

**Because they were there ..... It is so easy to focused on the doubts of Thomas - and it is just as easy to pass over that one simple little detail concerning the fact that he wasn't there when Jesus came. Thomas did not believe with the rest of the disciples because Thomas was not there to share in the experience of the risen Jesus.**

**I suppose that we could get into a long discussion about the fact that Jesus commends those who will believe even when they do not see. But even that misses the point that I think is so important for us to see today. Thomas did not believe because he had not been there to share the experience with the rest of the disciples. Think about it.**

**We live in a time when we have seen more and more people distance themselves from participation in the gatherings of the church family. Many years ago a pastor in California started a drive up church - you could just sit in you car and listen to worship happen. In our place and time, so many find it easier to stay at home and listen to worship on the radio or watch on TV - I can not begin to tell you how important I think both of those ministries are for us at First Lutheran - and yet I often think about how much we miss when we are not gathered with the rest of the family of disciples. Thomas wasn't there when all of the others had an experience of the risen Jesus. They saw, they touched, they shared it all - but Thomas was not there.**

**Being present is important. In the mind of God it was so important that He chose to deal with us in a very personal way. I suspect that God could have accomplished our salvation in any number of different ways but He chose, in His infinite wisdom to come to be present with us. It was not necessarily the easiest way but it was the best way. He came to walk among us. He**

came to touch us and be with us in the midst of our pain. Being present is important.

Ten disciples hide out - squeezed into a small room - waiting, questioning, afraid. One was not there when the risen Christ appeared at the door. They were all afraid. All had doubts. Doubts, questions, fears .... they are all very much apart of the human experience. Those things are not the enemy. In fact, there was a prominent theologian named Frederick Buechner who said, "*Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.*" It is precisely then and there - into our times of fear and doubt that our God continually chooses to come. He comes with life and invites us to let the fears and doubts go so that true peace can come.

It is my prayer that you will be present with your brothers and sisters as He comes to give His spirit and life.

AMEN