

“Jesus: An Invitation Extended”

The Vine Series... John 15:5

SCRIPTURE

John 20:24-29 (NIV)

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”

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.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Subject Question: What three “Invitations” does Jesus constantly and gracefully extend to people today?

Compliment answer: An Invitation to Observe, An Invitation to Receive, and an Invitation to Accept.

Big Idea: The three invitations that Jesus constantly and gracefully extends to people today are: An Invitation to Observe; An Invitation to Receive, and an Invitation to Accept.

Homiletical Idea: “God is Inviting”

Purpose: I want the congregation to consider, explore, and decide on whether to take Jesus up on His invitation to know Him.

Introduction: Today, we leave our series of messages about the wondrous person known as Jesus, to listen carefully to His Resurrected invitation to all of humanity in each generation. Is this Jesus real? What does He want from me? Who is this person that so many people seem to claim to know and yet, have never even seen him with their own eyes? If He is reaching out to me, then what do I have to do? We’ll be considering these questions this morning as we celebrate the resurrection of the One whom many call Lord.

Groundwork: The Easter Story, John 20:1-23 *20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.*

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

For Christians, the Easter Story contained in verses 1-23 is a wondrous part of our faith journey. The very fact that Jesus is not dead, promises eternal life to those who put their faith in Him and even now is praying and preparing a place in heaven for them is life itself. For folks who haven't come to know Christ yet, the story told by Saint John doesn't end. John picks up the account in verses 24-29 of a doubter, a skeptic, someone who wants to believe, but is a realist. His name is Thomas. But he represents many people. Perhaps even some here today. For the skeptics, the subject that we will be covering this morning is not an argument but a question, not a brow beating, but an invitation. An Invitation extended by a King who simply asks, won't you come home. Let's

look to day at an invitation to Observe, An Invitation to Receive and an invitation to Accept.

- A. An Invitation to Observe. (vs. 24-25) ²⁴ *Now Thomas (also known as Didymus,) one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”*
- B. Thomas was obviously one of the Disciples who had walked with Jesus for three years, had watched Him perform miracles, raise up the dead, and teach about living life in a way that had touched so many people’s lives. Jesus was not only his mentor, but his friend. Jesus was such a good person, such an inspiration, yet, his claim to be the Son of God was maybe a stretch, but O how Thomas wanted to believe!
- C. Thomas’ story isn’t unlike many today’s. They haven’t walked with Jesus in person, but they have heard about Him. They’ve had relatives that actually believed in Him, and talked about him. They have seen myriads of Christians who certainly weren’t perfect, but they did have something in their lives that in reality, seemed to make them happy and content.
- D. But They also wonder, like Thomas, what kind of mass hysteria is this anyways. I mean, come on, let be real! But also like Thomas in the deepest recesses of their own heart, they really want to believe, they really want to know for sure. There must be more in this life... The wonder of wonders is this, even in the curiosity, even in the hoping and knowing that one needs a little bit more “religion” in their life... is an invitation going forth from the heart of a living and loving King. “Look at my people. Observe them. They have what you secretly want.”

(Won’t you come Home?)

- A. An Invitation to Receive. (vs.26-27) 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.*
- B. Notice here, that Jesus did not come to Thomas in the moment of His doubt. In fact, Jesus waited an entire week to come back again. By this time, all the talk by the other apostles could not sway Thomas. He was

entrenched in His determination to doubt. You can talk all you want, but I'm a realist. You guys must be delusional. Must have been dreaming this stuff up. Just can't seem to accept the fact that the One whom we all had put so much faith in was gone—dead. They killed Him. Isn't it time to let the delusion stop and the dream die...?

- C. That's usually the place where most doubting Thomas or doubting Fred's find themselves. "I wish I could believe and I'm tired of discussing it." Don't you find it interesting however that Thomas was still hanging around. I mean, what made Him stay with the group who obviously were wrong, living in a dream world? And maybe he had come to the point where he was ready to give up on the entire thing.
- D. When we find ourselves pretty much ready to toss in the towel and frankly ready to move on... we also find ourselves back at church, again. Back hearing the same stories, again... I don't know who's more crazy, these people or myself for not letting this dream go. It's about this time, Jesus shows up—sometimes in a service just like this. And he extends to you an invitation to reach out and touch me. Let me prove myself to you. And what is interesting is realizing that Jesus showed up not for the ones who already believed, but for the one who didn't. I wonder who He is here today for? You, see, there is an invitation going forth from the heart of a living and loving King.

(Won't you come Home?)

- A. An Invitation to Accept. (vs.28-29) ²⁸ *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*
- B. Thomas was still a realist. But he no longer was a doubter. It was enough that Jesus had come and invited Him to touch Him, for provide the proof that he felt he so desperately needed to be a believer in this One Whom He had heard of; Had so secretly wanted to really believe in. Thomas never did get the physical proof that he had sworn he needed to believe. IN fact, he found that he didn't need to take Jesus up on His offer to "touch me, see that I am real." Ever wonder why?
- C. Because the silent Invitation had been accepted. And so it is with some today. Jesus has come and has somehow given you to ability to hear for yourselves His invitation to "come home. I'm real." And for some

reason, you have joined the ranks who know that He is not only Lord, But He is God. Who would have thought?!

D. The God who is interested and had been interested in you before you were ever born. He has watched over your life year after year. And you have always felt a strange love for Him... could it be that really that feeling is more of **His** eternal love that He has always had for you. And in His timing, you can finally see and believe that this King, this God is has not only never giving up on you, but is now as Thomas put it, my Lord and My God! He is the One who has never let you go. Has so gently stayed with you and now invites you of all people, to walk with Him, all the days of your life and when this life is over to come Home, to the real home that he has prepared for you. The real story of Easter isn't just about Jesus. It's a reminder to the believers and has always been an invitation to the doubters.