

Scripture:
John 20:19-31

“Jesus stand among us.”

Jesus stand among us!

As Christians we are called into community.

As 16th Century priest and poet John Donne ---- once penned ----- “No man is an island...”

No man --- no person ---- is an island ---- we are connected one to another --
- it's just the nature of who we are as human beings.

We were created for community ---- and we only ever flourish and grow in the context of community ---- Christian community.

Jesus stand among us.

Not just --- “Jesus stand with me.” --- but --- “Jesus stand among us.”

Jesus --- along with so many other things ---- is a community builder.

He called people --- He called disciples together.

Often --- in fact more often then He would have preferred even ----- people gathered around Jesus.

He was a community creator ----- and still is ---- as we are all witness to today.

Whatever else we may be ----- we are first and foremost a community gathered in His name.

And today in John's gospel ---- Jesus appears --- stands among His disciples as they gather as a community.

The disciples may have gotten a whole lot wrong --- and been mixed up about a fair number of things that Jesus taught and lived.

But one thing they seemed to have clearly understood ----- was the importance and necessity of community --- Christian community.

Here they are today in John's gospel ----- confused --- frightened ---- unsure about what to do next ----- but at least they are together.

Except for Thomas ---- at least initially anyway ---- which we'll get to.

But for now here they are confused --- frightened ---- unsure about what to do next ----- but they are at least together in one room.

And I can't help but think that this sounds and looks a lot like us too.

Whatever we may be feeling --- at the very least we come together every week ----- we may not all be here every week ----- just as Thomas wasn't there the first time ----- but week in and week out --- and all kinds of times in between as well ---- we gather ---- we come together.

"We're together again" ----- as we sang at the very beginning of our service ----- I love this song --- the words the tune ----- but most of all I love the message of it ---- whatever else ---- we're together again --- that's the most important start of worship --- showing up in the first place.

Wasn't it Woody Allan who said 80% of life is just showing up.

Well something like 80% of worship is showing up --- come and leave the rest up to God once you're here --- but be here ---- show up to worship.

"We're together again" ----- and like the disciples we too may be a little confused --- or unsure --- wondering what to do next --- and so we come together ---- inviting Jesus to come and stand among us ---- reassuring us and directing us.

And of course these reasons ----- confusion --- uncertainty --- fear ---- may not be the reasons we come together ---- it can be joy --- celebration ---- exultation ---- praise --- thanksgiving ---- and so many other reasons why we gather in His name.

But sometimes ---- just like it was for the disciples in John's gospel today ---
---- there can sometimes be a little uncertainty as we gather.

Part of what this passage reminds us is that no matter what we are feeling.

No matter what road has led us here --- gathering in His name --- is always a
good way of coping --- a good way of dealing with whatever it is that we are
feeling --- or dealing with in life.

Even Thomas who clearly had some pretty serious questions about what had
happened ----- Christ crucified --- Christ resurrected ----- gathers with the
other disciples on the first day of the week.

Sure he's absent the first time the disciples gather --- but he's there the next
time --- the next week.

Thomas may have doubted --- and who hasn't --- at some point we've all
likely had a moment or two ---- or more perhaps even --- of doubt ---- and
it's O.K. ----- it happens.

But Thomas doubts in community --- he doubts ----- but he doubts in
community ----- he is among the disciples when they gather doubts and all.

Jesus creates community ---- even when there are doubts about Him --- He
still creates community.

The resurrection creates community.

It is in the context of the gathered community that Jesus so often reveals
Himself --- and our scripture passage today is a perfect example of this ---
not just once but twice.

And not only this --- but when Thomas is absent the first time ---- Jesus
doesn't go out looking for him seeking to find him.

Instead He waits.

He waits until the disciples are together again ---- including Thomas ----- before He appears to them all again --- and before He appears to Thomas for the first time --- post resurrection.

Community --- Christian --- Christ centered community ---- is made up of all sorts ----- doubters ---- believers --- confused ones ----- confirmed convicted strong ones ----- lacking faith ones --- overflowing with faith ones ----- and every point in between.

It matters less where we're at when we gather --- and more that we simply gather together.

Many of us have likely heard the story of the pastor who went to visit a member of the congregation who hadn't been in church for some time.

So the minister goes and they gather around the hearth --- with the fire crackling away offering warmth and opportunity for fellowship.

And eventually as they chat ---- the pastor leans in takes the tongs and pulls out a burning red ember and sets it aside ---- by itself --- in the forefront ---- ----- away from the other logs and embers.

And as they talk the man speaks of how he just doesn't really see the need to come around to worship like he once did --- and how he's just having some doubts about things and figures it's best to just be on his own as he figures things out.

Why should he go to church he confesses ----- when he's seems to be figuring things out fairly well on his own ---- "I just needs a little time away" ----- he says.

And a little while later ----- the pastor points to the lone ember pulled aside on its own ----- and says to the man --- "See how weak it has become --- it's almost out now ---- very little warmth and vitality left."

And then he picks it up --- and puts it back in the fire among all the other embers ---- and invites the man to carry on talking.

And after a brief time ---- the once lone dying ember is humming red again -- and the pastor interrupts the man and says --- “Look at the ember now --- it’s bright and warm and strong again.”

And soon after the pastor concludes the visit --- and goes on his way --- confident that the man got the message that left alone --- taken away --- and separated from the community we grow weak and lose our glow and our warmth and our vitality.

Alone we quickly burn out ----- together we are bright and strong and warm and so much more.

Thomas doubts ---- but at least he does so in community.

The disciples may have been fearful and confused and unsure --- but at least they gather together to try to figure it out together instead of all going their separate ways and fizzing out.

The importance of community in this passage cannot be overstressed.

Because as many have suggested --- and I think there’s something to this --- this passage --- and not necessarily the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts - --- can very easily be considered the birth of the church.

Picking it up midway through verse 19 from John’s gospel today ----
 “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ---- And After He said this, He showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.
 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you!” As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.””

They gather ----- Jesus stands among them ----- He offers His Peace --- He breathes the Holy Spirit into them ----- He speaks of the forgiveness of sins -- -- and then sends them out in His name.

This is the precise movement --- the divine action that defines our worship -- -- our gathering in Christ.

We gather -----
 We invite the risen Christ to come and stand among us ----
 He offers us His peace -----
 He breathes the Holy Spirit ----
 We seek forgiveness ----- He provides it -----
 And we are sent out into the world as agents of Christ.

This passage shows us that we're really not all that different from the earliest of disciples.

This passage shows us that Christ has already come inside the walls ---- these walls ----- past the locked doors --- the sometimes parts of us that we hide or keep hidden away.

He has already done away with all of the self protecting resources that we can possibly have --- and He comes and He stands among us ----- bringing peace --- the Spirit of God ----- forgiving our sins --- and commissioning us to be His presence in the world.

And He does so meeting us at our point of need.

He meets the disciples in their fear.
 He meets Thomas in his doubts.
 After Peter has denied Him 3 times ---He forgives him and meets him in his sadness and disappointment --- embarrassment even likely.
 Jesus meets the woman at the well in fellowship ---- lifting her up.
 Jesus meets Paul and changes him from persecutor to faithful disciple.

And the list goes on ----- and on --- and on.

And the list goes on --and on --- to include each and every one of us here today ---- Jesus meets us wherever it is that we are ----- at our point of need.

And when He does He redeems the past --- and opens up the future.

The greatest thing about Jesus meeting us at our point of need isn't just that He knows us and comes to us without judgment or admonishment ----- it isn't even that He forgives us and sets us right ----- it's that He sees us as God would have us be.

It's that ----- He sees us as God would have us be.

The disciples are fearful ----- unsure --- very uncertain as to what to do next --- doubtful as to what exactly has happened ---- and Jesus comes to them and says --- "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

He sees them as God would have them be --- and not just as a group of fearful followers --- confused and out of sorts.

He sees them as the ones who will share the life giving --- life saving ----- reality of the Risen Christ.

We do well to remember that ----- it's not as though the disciples were together in a room --- gathered and giving thanks and reciting the psalms ---- - singing spirituals ---- or talking about Moses and the prophets ----- they were scared for their lives.

And Jesus comes and stands among them ----- taking them as fearful and confused and frightened as they were ----- and tells them just as God has sent me ---- so I am sending you --- be at peace --- receive God's blessing.

Be at peace ----- breathe in the Spirit --- you are forgiven.

Now go forth in my name ----- and share the forgiveness of sins ---- share the goodness of God ---- the Holy Spirit of God.

You're good enough --- God wants you to do this.

Just as God mends the whole of creation in Christ ---- so Christ mends us too ----- making the way for our future with --- and in Him.

Christ comes among the disheartened disciples all locked away in fear ---- and frees them ----- frees them from fear and unhealthy desires.

And He does it not by knowledge or understanding but by flesh ----- crucified resurrected flesh ---- He does it by standing among them.

Just as He stands among us whenever we gather in His name.

When Christ is in our midst ----- all the rest are just details.

All the rest is secondary --- subservient.

When we are rooted in Christ we have meaning and purpose and we have a mission.

And that mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ.

To continue to meet people where they are and share the good news of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

To continue to meet people where they are and share the Holy Spirit.

To continue meet people where they are and share the peace of Jesus Christ.

To continue to meet people and share Jesus with them ---- it's that simple ---
---- conceptually --- practically people can be pretty resistant to Christ.

As the Father has sent me so I am sending you.

God sent Jesus so that we might know Him --- and know the forgiveness of sins and newness of life --- newness of everlasting life --- everlasting relationship with Him.

And we are here to invite and encourage others to know Christ.

When Jesus stands among us ----- if we really feel Him here ----- we want everyone we care about to be a part of it too ---- we want everyone we know to know Him --- and be known by Him.

Jesus comes and stands among His forlorn and fearful disciples --- yes to comfort them and put them at peace.

But He also comes and stands among them to commission them.

To commission them to go forth in His name.

The disciples were not encouraged to leave the presence of Christ comforted and at peace and go home and enjoy this peaceful comfort by keeping it to themselves as they sat back and watched life go by.

God continually mends and renews us through the risen and ascended one.

And we are continually called to share the risen and ascended one that others might experience the saving ---- mending --- renewing power and presence of Jesus Christ.

And the time just after Easter is a powerful and potent time to share Christ.

And the time just after Easter is a powerful and potent time to share Christ because deep inside of people ---- once the bunnies and chocolate are all eaten up ----- there is a remnant of Christ being associated with this time of year.

Just as it is at Christmas ----- after the gifts --- trees ---- and eggnog and whatever else makes Christmas for people who don't worship Christ as a way of life --- just as there is still some remnant or at least vague association of that time of year having something to do with a guy called Christ.

So it is at Easter ----- and we are called to seize the opportunities to share the beauty of Christ with people.

Jesus standing among us changes everything.

Jesus standing among us doesn't just change us ----Jesus standing among us compels us to change everything we touch as well.

As we sing ----- "I will share the wondrous story" --- as we will shortly.

Perhaps we can consider our whole lives as a song of praise to Him.

To He who stands among us --- meeting us where we are ----- offering peace ---- breathing the Holy Spirit into us --- forgiving our sins ----- and commissioning us to be more than just another social group with good intentions.

We are called to lead others to the well of life.

The risen one who changed everything by saving --- by loving --- by feeding --- by picking us up off the floor of fear and doubt and disorientation and breathing new and everlasting life into us.

Jesus stand among us ---- means much more than just --- “Hey Jesus come and be with us.”

Jesus stand among us means Jesus come and energize us --- empower us --- equip us ----- commission us ---- to go and do as you would have us do.

And that’s precisely what Jesus did with His disciples in John’s gospel today.

They were a bit of a mess when He finds them ----- huddled up together doors locked for fear of their lives --- it was a real deep seated fear that brought them together now.

Jesus doesn’t merely stand among them ---- settle them down ---- and make them feel all good again.

He does all this plus He says now go out and do the same thing to others ---- - go out and share me --- my peace --- my forgiveness --- my Spirit ----- share it with all ----- because that’s what God wants you to do.

Jesus stand among us --- starts like a pebble in the water ---- where the circle of influence just keeps on getting bigger and bigger and bigger ---- until all the shores --- are the people of the world are affected by it.

We’re together again.

Jesus stands among us again.

And soon ---- Jesus sends us out again ----- to share Him ---- to invite others to know Him.

Jesus is the very best --- and most valuable thing we’ve got in this world.

Shouldn’t everyone now this --- and shouldn’t everyone know Him.

Until we're together again --- and He stands among us all again.

The peace of Christ be with you.

Now go and share Him.

Amen.