Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

He is Risen; He is Risen indeed, and I am convinced that nothing will separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. The first Sunday following the Great Celebration of Easter is always the story of Thomas. In as much as the women must go to the tomb to complete the ritual of preparing the body, so too Thomas must be absent when Jesus first appears to the disciples. Why, simply because it reveals God’s love more fully than if those events never happened.

Faith is a gift from God that allows us to believe that which we cannot see and that which simply cannot happen in the boundaries of human life. Who was given the gift of faith to believe that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead? As educated speculation only, I would suggest that Jesus’s mother Mary had the faith to believe that everything Jesus said would come to pass, including His death and resurrection. After all, she is the not present at the tomb and she is not specifically mentioned as one whom Jesus appeared to after His resurrection. Finally, remember the wedding of Cana; she merely said, “Do whatever He tells you”… words of unquestionable faith in knowing who her son and Lord truly are.

Being present and not seeing (or finding Jesus); being absent and not believing. Both categories reflect doubt and the failure to believe. At this point, I would like to reflect upon the words recorded in the Gospel of John, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life.

*“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in Him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”* (John 3:16-18)

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. Consider the people who did not believe after the resurrection, which is most of them. This is not a sentence of condemnation, but the opportunity to see that salvation is not up to the human condition, but rather a response to God’s love for us. Jesus comes to us in our doubt and reveals His love and protection for us; and brings us to a place of peace. It is going to happen to all people before the mortal experience comes to an end… the only question is when. What time will we be called into service?

Thomas is singled out as one of the twelve who did not believe, but the others likely did not believe either until Jesus appeared to them. However, Thomas did not believe the others either, which is the same place we are in the world today. Thomas is connected to the group of disciples that Jesus called, and for the last three years they shared a precious and intimate relationship with our Lord as He taught them and guided them into the truth. Thomas did not believe those closest to him in order to reinforce the love and protection of God. People cannot make people believe in God; only God can bring people to the belief in God; the belief in God’s only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Last week, we heard the words of Jesus who asked, “why are you looking for the living among the dead?” We know that Christ is alive and, in the world, and we are called to seek Him in the lives of a forgiven people. However, do we doubt this? Can we believe that our Lord resides within the hearts and minds of all people; especially the people we do not agree with? Especially people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs?

If we cannot see Christ in the world and in the lives of others, we might consider looking inward and asking why? Ask our Lord why we are seeking Him and cannot find Him? The answer might come in the form that we are indeed looking for the wrong things. We might be looking for that which we understand and fail to be led to understanding that the Spirit will bring forth.

We know the fruits of the Spirit; kindness, compassion, love, patience, forbearance, tolerance, and peace. If we cannot see the Spirit in others, if we cannot see Christ in others, it might be possible that they too see something other than Christ in our lives? Faith is not a competition, but rather the means of community. And it takes all the talents, skills, and gifts unique to each of us to build a strong, functional, and loving community in Christ.

This my friends is the message given to us in the reading from Acts; people coming together in Christ to ensure there is no need. Yes, in the narrative, there are physical items being sold for monetary exchange, but remember the apostles will go into the world and proclaim the Good News. They will be provided for on their journeys and travels and will have no need to return to land they own. They will not retire but serve the Lord until the end.

The thought of not owning anything is frightening today; the thought of not having anything is not what we might consider a place of comfort. And still, where there is no ownership in the form of land, home, or considerable possessions, there is also no limitation to your freedom to move as called by the Spirit. Again, there is a degree of doubt, which should not be a form of frustration and annoyance, but the means to grow in understanding. What God has given us all is never meant to be a burden, rather a blessing and sign of His grace and love. So then, what will we do with the gifts we receive?

Gifts are meant to be given, shared, and extended to all. Our faith is a gift that is precious and holy, and meant to be shared. God does not give the gift of faith to make our life more easy, calm, controlled, or peaceful; God gives the gift of faith so we might help those who struggle with doubt and darkness. He gives so we are a light in the world; a friend and companion to those who are looking not for Christ in the world, but who are looking for patience, kindness, forgiveness, and peace. Through all with the gift of faith, those who look for patience, kindness, forgiveness, and peace will come to find and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Doubt is a function of our human existence; a reality of our mortal limitations. To overcome doubt requires faith and trust that comes not from another person, but a loving and caring Lord alone, whose is the means of our peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Risen Saviour and Lord.