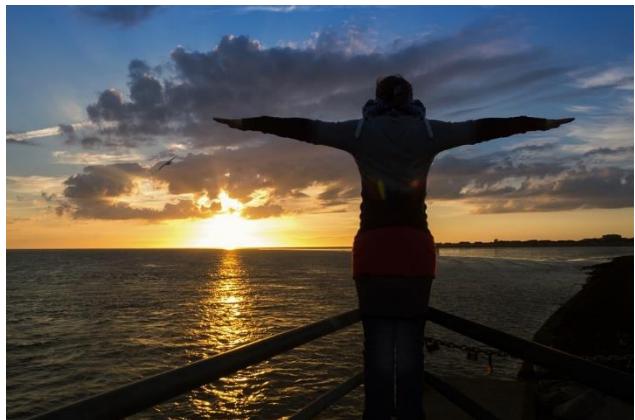


Faith to make you free!

Sermon on second day of Pentecost

John 20, 19-23



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.”

That can't happen! I don't believe it! I can't imagine that ever to be true! Do you know the feeling when something doesn't seem at all possible? Again and again there are things in life that do not fit into the pattern of our previous experiences at all. Normally these experiences make give us an uncertain feeling. We can become fearful, or even freeze in our footsteps. Sometimes exactly this feeling of being frozen und unmoveable can be pretty devastating. I know a little parable from India that explains this quite well. Apparently when young elephants are trained, they are tied to trees with thick ropes. The young animals learn from an early age that a rope always means that you cannot free yourself and run away. Later, several tons of adult elephant can be tied to a pole with a clothesline. Even then, these elephants cannot free themselves because they firmly believe that the clothesline is an insurmountable obstacle. If you observe this from the outside, you can be quite surprised. But this view from the outside is not possible for the elephants. They are caught up in their worldview and in their upbringing. That is why they are caught. They are thus frozen in their footsteps and in their worldview.

Much like the elephants, the first Christians after Jesus' resurrection did the same kind of thing. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead simply did not fit into the pattern of experiences. "If I don't see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger in the nail marks and put my hand in his side, I can't believe it," said Thomas. Actually, it is unfair that this Thomas was later called the "unbelieving Thomas". After all, Peter did not get the nickname denier. And are we not all like Peter and Thomas? And don't respond to the great gifts that God gives us humans. Instead, we only respond to the facts that we can prove. The fact is that people around us are constantly dying. Do you know anyone who just rose from the dead? What if death is really like a thin clothesline from which we can be freed quite easily? What if what makes us all shy away from death is ignorance? Aren't we caught by death like the Indian elephants because we are limited in our horizons?

The Pentecost event breaks through this barrier of ignorance. The Holy Spirit comes from a completely different world and shows us what Jesus can do for us. In our sermon text today, we also get a view into this other world. This is clear from the fact that Jesus simply walks through the wall. But the really amazing thing is this: Jesus walking through the wall is not a spirit. He is a man of flesh-and-blood, in whose side and hands Thomas can grasp. That

really blows him and everyone else. John explains the event so humanly that we can imagine it exactly. First dull fear, then shimmering hope, then stuttering confession "My Lord and my God!" All of this totally changes Thomas and the disciples. Fear must give way and make way for peace. Instead of cowering behind the walls, they get an assignment ... and best of all, they are allowed to know that the living Jesus is there! Here is here right with us! At this point it becomes clear what it means to be a Christian. Neither high philosophical wisdom nor power to do great miracles does it. But only this: knowing that Jesus is really there! This happens especially when we gather under his word. Especially when, like He said, we eat and drink his body and blood at the Lord's Supper. Then the living Jesus comes into our midst. It also hits our unbelief and changes us! It is a blissful moment that we receive here from the Apostle John. The disciple Thomas in the arms of his Lord with a beaming look ... And yet the words of Jesus point beyond this event. "Blessed is he who does not see and yet believes!" Jesus looks beyond this immediate practical experience of his disciple. And what does he see? He sees his church. His church in the far future. He sees us too! Maybe we will not be like Thomas. And not see Jesus who walks through the walls and makes it clear once and for all what is going on. Jesus doesn't this kind of thing. But he knows that faith relies on a that which you do not see. Faith dares to go where no common sense can go. Faith hopes where there is nothing to be hoped for from a human perspective. And faith must always prove itself under the test of doubt. After this blissful moment, Thomas and the other disciples also had to go out into the dark world with Jesus and face emnity. They had to preach and then receive the punishment of death for this. Almost all of the disciples therefore had to suffer death. They had to experience what Jesus describes here. Believe without seeing. This is the character of our Faith. For example: As a church, we get the hands of a normal person on our heads. who says to us: "Your sins are forgiven!" But we believe what we cannot see with our eyes. Namely that Jesus himself says these words to us. Even if we feel the pastor's hands and see the normal person in front of us. We also eat normal bread and wine with the sacrament. It is only our faith that tells us: "This is the true body and the true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!" We cannot always rest happily in the arms of our Lord Jesus. Our knowledge does not always go with the Faith. We do not always believe that Jesus has overcome death. Sometimes we are attacked by doubts and challenges. It is not uncommon for us to be haunted and depressed by many external influences. We cannot really describe what is happening there in words. It is like the third article of our faith says: "I believe that I cannot believe or come to Jesus Christ by my own strength and intellect. ... We cannot understand with our minds. We cannot see with our own eyes. But through the Holy Spirit who calls us and writes Christ in our hearts, we can ... Blessed joy, blessed faith ... blessed arrival in and with Jesus ... But these words are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you have life by faith in his name. Amen.