

Sermon Reading: John 20:30-31

Sermon Theme: Written Words for You

Where's Jesus? Completed in the 17th century some described it as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Walking down the aisle, seeing the architecture, the carvings, the paintings, everything is absolutely incredible. It's called the Rosary Chapel in Puebla, MX, also known as the Catedral de Oro—Cathedral of Gold—because gold covers the inside of this chapel. As your head twists and turns taking in all the paintings and figurines, statues and carvings of saints and angels it invokes the feeling like you are transcending into the presence of God in heaven. Your eyes are then drawn to the center where there's a magnificent altar on which stands an incredibly royal statue of...the Virgin Mary. It's truly amazing. But as we look around this church there's something missing. My friend asked the question, "*Donde esta Jesus?*—Where's Jesus?" And the response (a little jokingly): "They forgot him." Sadly enough, even in a place like that, one can forget Jesus.

Where's Jesus? It's Sunday evening the first Easter. It's not hard for me to imagine the women earlier that morning asking that question when they see the stone rolled away and the empty tomb, "Where's Jesus?" I can imagine Peter and John wondering that as they ran to the tomb after receiving the news from the women: "But where's Jesus?" As Jesus' followers sit behind locked doors out of fear of what was going to happen to them, I wonder how many of them were trying to put the pieces together from that day thinking: "So where's Jesus?" It seems like they forgot him—forgot what he said, forgot what he promised, forgot what this means for them.

Then Jesus is there with them! He shows his nail-marked hands and spear-stabbed side, they are overjoyed when they see the Lord, and even share the Good News with Thomas: "We have seen the Lord!" But there they are again—same place, same locked doors. Thomas demands, "Where's Jesus? I need to stick my fingers into the nail marks and hand in his side!" He needs the proof. If he doesn't see it, forget it. Thomas could not choose to believe this on his own any more than any of us. Instead Jesus does for Thomas just he did with the women at the tomb and the disciples the week before: Jesus comes to him. He tells Thomas: stick your finger here and your hand shove into there—stop being an unbeliever and believe.

But you are different. You have not seen him with your own two eyes like they did. You did not need to put your fingers anywhere like Thomas did. Blessed are you, Jesus says, because you have not seen and yet have believed.

But where's Jesus? You know his promises. You are assured of his word. But do you forget what this means for you? Like the disciples, we are quick to doubt when

our own plans fail to match up with God's plans. We plan for success, getting ahead, having a better life with opportunities to enjoy and experiences to offer our children. But when that doesn't happen according to my schedule or look like the picture I imagined, "Where's Jesus? Why doesn't he do this for me?"

What I do see is the mound of troubles for people I care about. I see the damage sin causes in his life. I know the weight of responsibilities and expectations she carries. I know this is something that another he and a different she needs but both are so busy. There's so much more that I don't see but you do. You know your present struggles you are wrestling with while doing your best to hide it or at least "fake it 'til you make it." You can look ahead and see future issues that you know you will have to face. But where's Jesus? It feels like we are playing "Where's Waldo" as we search for him amongst all of that.

Where's Jesus? We might not lock the doors of our homes out of fear of those who hate Jesus. Still, there are times you might feel locked, trapped in yourself out of fear what tomorrow will bring. You might be afraid or unsure of how he will react if we talk with him faith and Jesus, so we lock up and say nothing at all. There's fear of past sins and current struggles with temptation that we are afraid someone might find out. Fear of loneliness and wondering if anyone cares can entrap you from doing anything. Fear of failure—being the disappointment, not fulfilling your personal expectations for what you need to do—can cripple and paralyze. Fear of not knowing how you are actually going to get through this—you know you will but you still don't to do it... And where's Jesus? You know the answer like you might know the answer in class. You have the knowledge in your head. But knowing isn't believing.

So where's Jesus? He's right here: **"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"** (John 20:30-31).

Curious minds like mine sometimes wonder about those other signs. I think it would be fascinating to know. But I guess we will have to wait until heaven to sit down with Peter, James, John and the other disciples and learn that stuff. Until then, you have everything you need right here to find Jesus. You aren't going to find him out there in the blowing wind and quiet nature. Sure, you see how amazing your God is, how powerfully he created a world like this, how vast and beautiful that we have a God of order who did all of this. But that's it. You aren't going to find Jesus at home with the family or with your friends. Whatever it is, work, hobbies, things you enjoy, people you are with; sure, you can learn a lot

about God that he blesses and gives you these things. But without Jesus we quickly wonder, why we don't have this like they do? We are quick to doubt and question God's goodwill. You see all the garbage in this world and wonder, "What type of God doesn't do something about all of this? Where is he?" Without Jesus we can't make real sense of the life here and we wouldn't have life to look forward to after here either.

So where's Jesus? He's right here where he promises to be. Every page of the Bible is ultimately about him. You might not see his name. It might just be a page of numbers and listing of the families of Israel. And, yet, even those are centered on Jesus. Those families show you Jesus is part a real group of people who were part of real history that is written down through time.

That's how he continues to operate with us. We don't always "see" Jesus on every page of our lives; he's there all the same. These words are written not just so that we have a knowledge about this person Jesus, how great he is, what type of person he is. These words are written for you. They are written that you might believe—that is, you have something to hold onto and grasp as your own. This Jesus isn't just some character in history. He is for you. He is the Messiah—the Christ—God's chosen one from before the foundation of the world. He's the one promised in the prophets and sang about in the Psalms. He's the one God chose to be the crusher of Satan's head; the seed of the women to be Savior of all. He's God's Chosen One born of the Virgin Mary, born under the Law to buy us back and set us free from its demands and expectations.

He's the Son of God—the very essence of God, true God from eternity, of one being with Father. He is the Word who was with God in the beginning and is God by whom and through whom all things were made.

It's by this Chosen One, the Son of God, that you have life for there is no other name under heaven by which we are saved. His name is everything that he has done and everything that He is. His name is Jesus because he came to save his people from their sins. This is God's Son who the Father loved and gave him up for us because he loved you in this way. He's not just someone to know about; he's the one who God did not spare but dumped on him the collective sin of all mankind of all time. He's the one God crushes and forsakes so that you might be made whole by his wounds and have peace with God. This is Jesus who says without a doubt in his mind his life was enough for you, his blood paid your entire debt to God, "It is finished." He is true God who suffers and dies for you. He's God's Holy One who he would not let rot away in that tomb, but on Easter morning, he lives. And, therefore, because he lives, you have life in his name. The

empty tomb tells you that your sins are forgiven in whole. That empty tomb means forgiveness is yours full and free. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. This isn't because we have earned or deserved it. It's not because of our human will or that we chose him. He chose you. And then he breathes out the Spirit who works through these same words that you believe this to be true.

Where's Jesus? Because he lives you don't need to go on some spiritual journey to find him. He's right here where he promises to be. So we come to God's house, not because we are doing something for him, no! It's here where he comes to you and promises you he will be. He's there where He speaks through a pastor who tells you, "Your sins are forgiven," and they really are because he's given us the Holy Spirit. He's there bringing you to the baptismal font where he unites you with him in his death and raised you with him. He washes you with water and the Word and Jesus' blood purifies you of every sin. He's there giving you his body and blood—with eyes of faith you do see him giving himself to you so that you have peace because your sins are forgiven in His name.

Where's Jesus? He's there in the flesh at God's right hand victoriously ruling all things for your eternal good whether we see him or not. Where's Jesus? He's here in the Word and Sacrament where he promises to be. Where's Jesus? He's with you always. And he brings you back to these words that are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you have life in his name. Peace be with you. Amen.