**John 20:19-31 19On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” 22After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” 24But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples kept telling him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” 30Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

Witness Marches Victorious Over Restraint

Do you believe everything you hear or do somethings take a while for you to accept? I find it particularly difficult when something I hear just doesn’t line up with what I know. Lots of people are like that. It’s hard for them to have an open mind to challenge what they know for sure. Those ideas and beliefs become so locked it that to get them to have even a little wiggle room can take time, work, and even sometimes just giving up and putting it into the hand of someone else (which is never an easy thing to do).

Lots of people say lots of things and know lots of things. How much do you believe? How much do you doubt? Would you trust someone who told you that tomorrow is going to be bright and sunny or would you need to wait and see what would happen? A lot of people are restrained when it comes to what they haven’t seen. They have an ample amount of skepticism. Sometimes too much. What the know can even make them afraid even when the truth is right in front of them.

We find the disciples together with their wildly running thoughts in the days after Jesus’ resurrection. The atmosphere is full of questions. They were locked up in a house. They were probably tired but more than that, they were afraid. Just a few days ago, they had witnessed Jesus executed and now people were saying that they saw him alive. Then suddenly Jesus stood among them. Everyone was overjoyed to hear Jesus speak, **Peace be with you.** It was the truth. Jesus was alive again after death.

You would think that alone would get the chains of fear and doubt to break off the disciples that moment. You would think all of them would be running out the doors and telling everyone that Jesus was alive. Why do you think that Thomas didn’t believe? Why were the disciples behind those doors again the next week? Why not trust Jesus right away?

It’s hard when we have our own ideas drawn to conclusions to get over them. For three years, the disciples had followed Jesus and knew he was the promised One from God. But they saw him die. They heard things that didn’t feel right. They saw Jesus arrested, even though he was all-powerful. They knew Jesus was tortured and crucified even though Jesus could raise people from the dead. Powerful things done by Jesus and to Jesus. Everything they saw was against what they believed. The disciples show that sometimes it takes more proof.

People don’t just hear something about God once and then they live the freedom to believe it completely and let go of what they thought with full trust. God doesn’t make belief like a quick download and then it is there forever. God has everyone in a place where they are currently and meet them where they are at while he brings witness after witness to his goodness, forgiveness, love, and grace.

Have ever been restrained by doubt that you are afraid and unbelieving? Trials and troubles have their way of captivating out thoughts, our beliefs. At times it seems like it should be so easy for everyone to just believe. but doubt still is the number one cause today of trouble, difficulty, hardship. And it comes from the whole belief that we have it right. Therefore, we are locked up by what we believe. It can take a while before the restraint is broken.

It's easy to believe in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter. In the fact, that Jesus, a very really person, was raised from the dead on Easter. It’s easy to believe on that day when all things are well. It’s hard to believe when you’re in the ER and the struggle with health problems is front and center. It’s easy to believe that Jesus rose when you are surrounded by people singing, “I Know that My Redeemer Lives.” It’s hard to believe when you are surrounded by people who don’t believe in anything and everyone believes you are foolish for being a Christian and they can show you proof that God doesn’t exist. When such difficulties and hardships enter our lives, faith is tested. Beliefs are shaken. We struggle.

What is there to do when we come across the restraint of doubt in ours or even in ourself? Jesus displays a simple way. Witness. Jesus appeared again. He repeated his statement again, **Peace be with you.** Jesus even shows the patience of God with those who take a bit longer to believe and trust. **“Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.”**

Jesus understands people. If would have just been for Thomas’ benefit to see Jesus, do you think he would have appeared to all the disciples again or would he just have appeared to Thomas in private? We can’t know for sure but what they witnessed broke restraints on all the disciples. In fact, you might even be able to say Thomas freedom took less than the rest of the disciples who a week after seeing Jesus alive and hearing him speak “peace” to them were back behind those locked doors with their fear.

For Thomas, the witness Jesus made with his words, hands, and side freed Thomas to do something unique in all of the Bible. **Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”** Just like that. Sure, it took a little time. Yes, the Holy Spirit didn’t work instantaneous belief. But here is the only place in the Bible that flat our calls Jesus my God. No more restraint for Thomas. Those who battle the most and yet strive to overcome, turn out to be some of Christ’s strongest disciples. That sounds like Thomas. An appearance from Jesus gave victory over restraint. His statement doesn’t display hesitance. Boldness. Joy. Peace. Belief to be under the Lordship of Jesus. Trust to live knowing the true God.

Jesus wants that for you. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.** What is the cure for restraint? Simply put: the witness of Jesus. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding. The message of a Savior who is alive again after he died on the cross for your sins. Today Jesus looks you and I in the eye as we read the Bible or hear his Word proclaimed to us by other Christians. What do we see when we read the Bible, what do we experience when we take the Lord’s Supper? We witness a Savior who looks at us and says, **Peace be with you.**

What are you afraid of in life so much that it restrains you from boldly proclaiming **My Lord and my God**? Look at your problems. Look at where you struggle with putting God’s Word into practice. We struggle with restraint because we fear what is going to happen to us. Jesus gives us his Word over and over, his witness over and over, to tell and show us he is Lord and God and can be trusted, proclaimed, and believed. Where in your life is doubt of God saying what is best for you still holding you down?

Our unbelief frequently gets us to stick with what we think is the best rather than to believe Jesus. We are ashamed to boldly live Jesus because we think it might hinder our getting something we want or desire. Does God really have what is best for me in mind? Does Jesus really care about me enough that I can just trust him with every thing at every time?

**Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.** You might not like ugly painful looking scar. In fact, you might be ashamed of them. Those scar of Jesus show God has in mind what is best for you and that Jesus loved you to death and back. Every day when we look at Jesus, we know just how much he loves us. Want to overcome your doubts and fears that make you hesitant and restrained as a Christians? Scars upon your Savior.

There are times in your life when your unbelief will restrain you from boasting about Jesus being your Lord and your God. You’ll doubt that God really loves you. You’ll be angry with God. You’ll wonder if he cares about you. Maybe that’s you right now. When that happens, go to the Bible and look at the scars of Jesus Christ. Listen to his words of forgiveness and grace. Witness him march up to you to prove once again that he is your Savior. **Peace be with you.** Amen.

Points to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* What made the disciples afraid during the days after Jesus’ death? (Give two)
* In what areas of life do you often find yourself void of resurrection peace? How does the resurrection bring peace to that fear?
* Take a moment to ask God to help you with what restrains you, especially the areas in your life you are tempted to handle of your own.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have not forsaken us or left us to our own destruction but kept your promise to send a Savior. We praise you for his perfect life, his innocent death, and his glorious resurrection. Because of your faithfulness to your promises, today is a day of victory.

Savior Jesus, we praise you for carrying out God’s plan of salvation to bring peace to sinners. Your resurrection is undeniable evidence that you have triumphed over sin, death, hell, and the Devil. Because of your resurrection, today is a day of victory.

Holy Spirit, we praise you that through the gospel you have led us to know and believe that Jesus is our risen Savior. Today we say confidently, “He has risen.” Preserve us in faith. Break the restraints of false belief and unbelief. Raise us to newness of life and boldness to proclaim you as our Lord and our God.

O Lord, thanks be to you for giving us the peace of victory of sin through Jesus Christ. Amen.