# 1 John 1-2:5New International Version (NIV)

**1**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2**The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3**We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4**We write this to make our joy complete.

**5**This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in God there is no darkness at all. **6**If we claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. **7**But if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

**8**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**9**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **10**If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and God’s word is not in us.

**2**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with God—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2**He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

# John 20:19-31New International Version (NIV)

**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.”

**24**Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25**So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

**26**A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” **27**Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

**28**Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

**29**Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

**30**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.

“So That”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 24, 2022

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

**Sing Conjunction Junction** . . . You can hear this little selection from the 1970s Saturday morning program, Grammar Rock, as an indication that you are about to hear a kind of a grammar lesson. Well, it’s a lesson in reading transitional phrases, I guess. Sometimes, when we hear or read a scripture lesson, we can find ourselves paying such close attention to what we might think of as the “big words,” like *peace* and *dark* and *light* that some of the little helper words can be lost on us, and on mornings like this, they are very important. In this morning’s lessons, it is a simple two words that tell us just exactly what John wants us to take from his sharing. Yes, the image of dark and light that John uses is powerful and important and helps us understand the effect of walking with Jesus. Also important, of course, is the peace that Jesus offers his first disciples and us. How we get to a place where this peace and the other gifts of discipleship are apparent and available for us is just as important, however, and perhaps is a part of why we are gathered here this morning. If we pay attention to what I think of as a most important transitional phrase, “so that,” we aren’t left with much to figure out, but of course are left with actions to take and life to live. Reading the lessons closely may even move us to proclaim with Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”

**“1**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” John begins his letter understanding the kind of doubt that filled Thomas in our Gospel lesson, and so tells his readers—tells us—that he and others have seen for themselves all that he writes about and he has felt it with his own hands. John knows that the difference between belief and faith can feel like a tremendous leap across what feels like a bottomless chasm. We want to be able to *prove* all the stories so that we can believe, when what we are asked to do is make the leap that gives us faith in God’s love for us. That faith in God’s love for us, in God’s desire for our life to be good is the gift in this morning’s lessons and in our Christian discipleship.

John continues his letter by telling us *why* he shares it and does so in the little phrase I invite you to follow. “**3**We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4**We write this to make our joy complete.” So that you may have fellowship with us—us, including God, both Creator Parent and Son, Jesus. I then imagine replacing a word in that last sentence: “We write this so that our joy is complete.” Without inviting us into that incredible fellowship with God, John’s joy isn’t complete. Maybe you feel that way about friends and family who don’t come to worship with you, or anywhere with anyone. You know what they are missing, and so you wish they were a part of this fellowship. I pray often for my friends and family who need so much to be part of this fellowship. I pray *so that* they might eventually be moved to respond to my invitations.

Just in case you, right along with me and with everyone else whom John addresses, think that simple membership in this fellowship, or attendance in worship is all that our belief should move us to do, John clears things up as he continues. The Christian fellowship into which we are invited is not a passive acceptance of an idea. Our Christian discipleship does ask that we live in new ways when we have been drawn into the light of God’s love. John speaks it plain. He tells us that if we walk in the light of Jesus and continue to sin without repentance, we are lying. I read and reread this passage this week, because initially we might think that John expects us to stop sinning, to stop doing the things that hurt other people and ourselves, the minute we have faith in Jesus. Wouldn’t it be cool if that were true? Well, just as wonderful is the fact that God forgives the things that put distance between us and others, between us and God, but we first have to acknowledge these things, these sins. We learn that to love and to show mercy; to forgive and to build peace is our Christian task. When we do otherwise we need to admit it, and we need to ask God to forgive us. Then, and no matter how often we stray, God forgives us. Jesus has mended our relationship with God, or as we sometimes call it, has *atoned for our sins*, and for this we can always be grateful. Be careful, though! John tells us as clearly why he writes all this about light and dark. He writes, “*so that* we will not sin.” Yes, God forgives us, but imagine a world without sin. Imagine being strong enough in our faith that we lived the lives that God would have us live, modeling our actions and our thoughts after Jesus. Imagine if we did not somehow, symbolically, continue to ask Jesus to go to the cross.

We read this morning from John’s letters, and we read from the Gospel according to John, and in both we have to read carefully *so that* we don’t miss the *reasons* for John’s sharing. Poor Thomas. He gets kind of a bad rap, doesn’t he? For the last 2,000 years or so, if someone wants to see before they can believe, they’re called a Doubting Thomas. Imagine that kind of legacy, eh? I’m getting a bit ahead of the story, though, and in reading closely we don’t want to forget about what I earlier referred to as the “big words.” The last we heard from the Gospel of Mark was that the tomb was empty and that the women who found it so were told to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Now, gathered in fear of discovery, the disciples have yet to see and believe for themselves. Jesus enters the room and offers his faithful followers the gift of peace. He fills them with the Holy Spirit and in so doing tasks them with offering forgiveness of sins. What a gift from the Holy Spirit! But poor Thomas . . . he missed out on seeing Jesus the first time. Can you blame him for initially doubting that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Really, think about it . . . His rather detailed need to see the marks of his torture may seem extreme, but when the moment comes, he sees Jesus and knows the truth we are here to discover: “My Lord and my God.” Poor Thomas. Too many people remember him as the doubter, and not as the disciple who heeded the call to share the good news. The churches in the extreme south of India are credited with his having brought the Gospel of Jesus there. Now that is a strong faith and dedicated mission.

We can ask ourselves now whether we are the blessed who believe without having seen. We *have* heard! We have been received into fellowship in Christ, who has been raised from the dead. John writes, “**30**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*.”* Maybe when you get stuck in those moments of doubt, you can remember the goal of John’s sharing. In this translation, we have a kind of an abbreviated phrase. Do you hear it? “These are written *so that* you may believe . . . and *so that* by believing you may have life in his name. By believing, we may have life in Jesus’ name. Oh, that life is good, and the change we can look for is evident at Easter. God has won over death. Jesus has been raised! Maybe this key fact is the stumbling block for you, as it was for Thomas.

There are no holes in the body of the Christ we see here today. We see instead the works of Christ that make us know the resurrection is real: those who serve others in our midst. For me, that sometimes looks like the email messages I receive throughout the week, sharing the needs that you all have seen in others in our fellowship. Resurrection is real not only in those whose bodies have been healed following stays in the hospital, but also in those who have discovered hope after despair. That hope has often come in the form of all of you, reaching out in love. That love might look pretty simple to some of you: it looks like a ride to go shopping, or like a meal prepared when others are too tired or sore; it looks like a phone call when you hear someone is grieving, or a card in the mail to say you miss someone; it looks like making the time for children this summer to show what a life of faith has looked like for you; it looks like stacking the shelves of the Tree of Life or writing elected officials asking them to support refugees from throughout the world.

Resurrected living is abundant life in loving others, and that kind of heaven doesn’t wait. It starts today *and* it began with Jesus; it is eternal *and* it starts in this moment. We remember it as we celebrate all that Jesus did for us and Jesus’ presence with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, our Lord and our God, became one of us *so that* by believing we may have life. Amen.