***Sermon Text for February 16, 2014***

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Exodus 32:1-6, John 20:19-29

“My Lord and My God”

 I am so glad that this winter chose this year, because if it had come a couple of years ago you all would have blamed us and said that we had brought it with us. Pretty amazing winter isn’t it? It really had wreaked havoc on our school schedules, our preschool has been out more than it has been in session in this New Year. Some of us are wondering what God is thinking in all of this. I’m just glad that it is going to be 60 and sunny on Saturday the 22nd, the day of the auction.

 This has also been the week of declarations as people have made the news declaring who they are and how they primarily define themselves. This church has a mission statement and we declare that we are a people who want to be defined as those: knowing Christ, growing in Christ, going with Christ. This is a good understanding of who we are and what we believe. It hangs in our Fellowship Hall for everyone to see. Our country made a declaration many years ago so that all would know that it stood up to tyranny and it would no longer be pushed around.

 You’ve heard of doubting Thomas haven’t you? Today he makes a declaration, a statement on this next to last day that we find ourselves in the Gospel of John. A statement that as Christians represents and reflects who we are to the core that supersedes gender, race, class, sexual preference or orientation, or any other way that we define each other. Thomas who is given a bad rap in Scripture is the author of our declaration as Christian which is Jesus, you are our Lord and our God.

 Not very fancy is it? But the impact this should have on us is a recognition that Jesus as God gives us life and as Lord something for which to live. Let’s see how we live in that truth.

In December I upgraded my phone from a blackberry to an iphone and I’m amazed at the difference. It seems as if every waking moment I could find myself attached to this thing. It tells me the weather, the news, the sports, I can get my email, and talk into it and it will automatically give me directions. It is amazing. I have no idea how I ever lived without it. My favorite feature, though, is the app called ibooks. It allows me to download pretty much any book that I want on my phone and read it. So I’ve read A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein, Wuthering Heights, now I’m making my way through the Time Machine. I love the classics as you can see.

 In the Time Machine an inventor goes thousands of years into the future and when he lands he is greatly disappointed because of the civilization that he finds. It is terribly backwards and every progress that had been made somehow got rolled back and any hopes that his generation had for the future he notices over these next thousand years will be scaled way back. Instead of a society that is so far progressed that it would be impossible to imagine, instead the opposite is true, it has so regressed that it would be hard to distinguish from the caveman era.

 The Gospel of John, it was not so long ago that we started it, but do you remember how the Gospel begins? In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And we saw that this harkened back to what? Genesis 1:1, thousands of years ago when God had incredible plans for us and these plans were realized in the new covenant of Jesus Christ.

 The Gospel of John begins as it all begins with God and with the Word Jesus Christ as the one true God. Interestingly it ends in the same way, with this declaration by Thomas that Jesus is God.

 But let’s set the stage for the declaration that Thomas makes. The disciples the Scriptures state, were gathered together in a house, and I love this detail, with the doors locked. There they were huddled in fear, confusion, with some of them saying they had seen Jesus, it was the same evening as when some had raced to the tomb to find it empty. They were afraid because if someone had taken the body of Jesus they would be the primary suspects.

 The scene is cast and the locked door tells it all. It reminds me of Peter in Acts 12 where the disciples are praying that Jesus would be freed from jail, he escapes and pounds on the locked door of the house where they are praying and Rhoda doesn’t let him in because she is so excited that she is there. God had answer the disciples’ prayer but they nearly got Peter killed because of it. On this Easter Sunday evening Jesus appear in the midst of them without any explanation to how he got in to be with them.

 As he greets them he says in these verses 3 times, Peace be with you. Just like in chapter 14 where we saw him leave a peace that was very different from the peace that the world left so this peace is a peace that Jesus leaves with his disciples. The result of this visit is Jesus breathing on them, which again should take us back to where? Genesis. Where God creates us, and we are not alive until he actually breathes his life in us. God give us life by breathing into us in Genesis, Jesus gives his disciples the will to live by breathing on them. Look at vs. 20 and you see how their attitude changes dramatically. They go from being without hope to a group that is able to rejoice together.

 Actually the Greek is a bit unusual because Jesus voluntarily shows them his hands and his feet and his side where the nails had been driven and where the spear had pierced. And the Greek states and they saw, or as a result of seeing these marks, they rejoiced.

 It should sound like I John 1:1 where the author states: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands.” They were able to see, feel and touch Jesus. And they rejoiced.

 But one of them was missing. We don’t know why. He comes back after the day of resurrection and Peter and John say they saw an empty tomb, Mary Magdalene that she saw Jesus, or maybe it was just a gardener, she couldn’t be sure, all of them spoke though of how he had appeared on Sunday evening to all of them in that room.

 I don’t believe it. I haven’t seen anything, and unless I touch his nail marks and put my hand in his side, I won’t believe it. Come on. You see Thomas gets a bad rap. They all got to see Jesus so their faith had been given a sign, was given what was needed. From just about every person in the Bible that asks for a sign or simply provided a sign from an angel or a host of angels, to an ark of the covenant, you name it. We have been a people who have believed because we have seen. Thomas is no different from any other person in the Bible, except he didn’t get to see the sign.

 The people of Israel in Exodus were not unlike Thomas or any of us. Their leader Moses delayed and they wanted to see God now. Aaron, you’re second in command, you make a calf out of our gold. The details of this story that is the most disturbing is found in verse 6 where after they had made the calf and before they had actually worshipped it they did what? They went to bed, they had a night to sleep on it and let cooler heads prevail, but that didn’t happen did it? This wasn’t a rash, spur of the moment decision by the people of Israel, this was now their new way of life. They were impatient, not ready for God to work according to His time. So they created a new way of life that suited their timing, and their desires to have something concrete and something that they could worship that more closely reflected what they liked.

 You know the history of the church is one of patience, not of scrambling trying to keep up with the times or chasing after this new idea or theology or fad or worship style. God lvoes a patient church because it reflects his patience. People are anxious today, I mean very anxious with both sides lining up to the microphone to make a statement, to raise up another golden calf who will be the one who brought us this far. That’s what happens when we become impatient, we create a new god and reinvent history.

 It is hard to keep everything straight today. In one week a soon to be professional football player Michael Sam makes a declaration. Elle Page makes a declaration and in the face of this, culture demands that a stand be taken and that it be taken now. In this church that is a family and that contains the spectrum of thought and theology, which is what I love and what I want to foster, but I have been pressured by both sides to take a stand. I thought I had, but it doesn’t seem to be enough. I’m told if you sit in the middle of the road you get hit by traffic on both sides.

 But the history of the church is to be patient. Thomas makes a declaration and a statement but it took him time before he could. All of his best friends and those who meant the most to him were not able to persuade him. But it took more than time for him. It took the physical presence of Jesus himself before Thomas was able to give us the declaration upon which this church stands. Jesus, my Lord and my God. It is upon this Lordship of Jesus that this church was built and upon which it now stands.

 Not any other issue props this church up, no political party, no way of life, and no other ideology. Throughout the Gospel we find Jesus responding to the issues not with statements and declarations, but with questions. If he were around today he would be pressured to come up with ultimatums, statements that would make people choose. But his way was to ask a question which allowed everyone to come up with an answer on their own.

 Thomas made his declaration not because he was forced into a corner, not because he realized he was on the wrong side of history, but because Jesus himself appeared to him, I want you to imagine that you have a time machine and you go ahead 50 years from now. How old will you be? Will you still be around? But know this, the issues that are so important today are no longer being talked about or discussed. The style of worship that we have today has either disappeared or it is the old way to worship. The question we need to ask is are we today doing all that we can and focusing on that which is our declaration because it will make us more and more like the bride of Christ.

 If we focus on My Lord and My God, we will bring him honor. If we steer toward that which is the topic of the day, it might last a generation, but then that will fade away, while the Word of the Lord will last forever. Amen.