

Sermon Easter 2A
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant - Drive-In Worship
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon
April 19, 2020

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Nine minutes. Nine minutes was how long it used to take me to drive my first car from my house in West Ashley to my best friend's house on Johns Island. Back then, the definition of traffic on Johns Island was getting stuck behind a tractor. But even then, 9 minutes was way too short a time for someone to safely drive between our two houses. But... if you've ever been a teenager, you may understand the urgent need to get to your best friend's house in a hurry.

Now, she lives over an hour away. She and her husband found a perfect little patch of waterfront property down on Yonges Island and we just moved just about as far north as we possibly could have and still be considered in the town of Mt. Pleasant.

So, needless to say, with life, work, family, and the distance between us, we don't see each other quite as often as we used to. We were doing a really good job of scheduling dinner dates together every few weeks, but now, with social distancing, that's on hold.

The other day, she called, just as I was leaving the house to venture to the grocery store and said she was in my neck of the woods, just having left a medical appointment nearby. So we decided it wouldn't be "breaking the rules" if we both pulled into a nearby parking lot just to say hello. We parked a few spots away from each other, and leaned on the hoods of our cars, and shouted at each other for a few minutes, just to catch up. And you know, for a little while there, it didn't feel that different from when we used to sit on the hoods of our cars After a high school football game and shoot the breeze.

I had been anxious leaving the house to brave the task of grocery shopping, but after seeing my friend's face, I felt so much better. I don't think I realized how much I missed her until I got to see her. It was definitely

the spiritual pick-me-up I needed to keep on going in today's uncharted waters. I'm sure Kris could hear the excitement in my voice when I came home and blurted out, "Guess who I saw?" when all I expected to see that day were a bunch of masked strangers.

"We have seen him!" we hear the disciples exclaim on this the 2nd Sunday of Easter. "We have seen the Lord!" they blurt out to Thomas, when he comes back into the house where they were staying. I have seen the Lord!" was the very first witness to the resurrection When Mary Magdalene ran from the empty tomb on Easter morning to share the good news with the other disciples. When she sees the Lord, Mary exclaims "Rabbi!" and then her next instinct must have been to hug him, because we read that Jesus says 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.'

And when he appears to the disciples, we read that their reaction is to rejoice when they saw the Lord. Can you imagine what that looked like? He may have also asked them to refrain from hugging him, we don't know, but I bet they were hugging one another, high-fiving, all but swinging from the rafters, when all of a sudden, he appeared there right in front of them. They were locked away in the house, unnerved, afraid, grieving. And just imagine the joy, the relief, the spiritual resurrection they felt when the very one whom they were mourning, their Master, their Lord, appeared in their midst.

How they longed to see his face. How they longed, like their sister Mary, to hear him call their names. And then, all of a sudden, behind locked doors, there he was - in the flesh! Rejoice I'm sure they did when they saw with their own eyes that what Mary told them was true, that what the Lord himself had promised them, had come to pass, despite all odds.

But Thomas wasn't there. Thomas was out. Maybe it was his turn to go out and get the groceries. Maybe he was the only one willing to risk life and limb to venture out in a hostile environment to get supplies or information to bring back to the others. Or maybe he was just sick of cowering in fear. We don't know. But for whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there. When he hears them blurt out to him, "We have seen the Lord!" His reaction is pause. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands," he says, "and put my finger in the mark of the nails...I will not believe." Oh, Thomas, how your reputation has been etched in history for this statement. "Unless I see... I will not believe."

We call him doubting Thomas; we wag our finger at his lack of faith... but what did he want? He only wanted exactly what everybody else got - to see the Lord! Mary saw him. the other disciples saw him. Now he wanted to see him. He wanted no more proof than what each of them had received. And what about the ten there, locked away in the house without him, did they doubt any less than he? They who wouldn't even leave the house Even after hearing the testimony of Mary, that Jesus indeed lived? Were they rejoicing over Peter's account of the Empty Tomb, or did they too need to see him with their own eyes? And just imagine how much more Thomas' heart longed to see and touch his Savior after hearing that his dear sister and brothers already got to see him.

These days, I think it is easy for us to imagine his longing. I think right now, we can relate to the yearning he must have felt to see the one he so loved and missed so much. There are so many loved ones we want to see, to hold onto, to hear apart from the use of a cell phone. My prayers are particularly with those who are separated from their loved ones at the time of illness, and those who are not able to sit by the bedside of family or friends facing the end of life. We know firsthand that longing, that spiritual yearning, to be reunited again with those from whom we are now separated, by distance, By self-isolation, or even by death. We too, just like Thomas, are waiting for the time when we can see with our own eyes, reach out with our own hands.

For Thomas, the waiting must have been torture, especially having to grapple with the fact that he wasn't there. But unlike for us, for Thomas, the waiting only lasted a week. For we read, that a week later, when they were all together, Jesus came and stood among them and again said to them, "Peace be with you." Then he said to

Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." And upon seeing Jesus, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Now this reaction is extraordinary. Thomas' exclamation here is one of the most clear and profound statements of faith in Jesus uttered by anyone in any of the Gospels. When Mary sees him outside the tomb, she calls him "Teacher!" Others call Jesus Master, Lord, even Messiah... ..but here, on Thomas' lips, we hear the fullest expression of worship of Jesus not only as the son of God, but as God himself.

Notice the difference here between the reaction of the others and of Thomas. The gospel tells us that their response is rejoicing, but his is praise. Theirs is joy, but his is worship. Both are obviously appropriate responses, upon seeing the risen Lord. but while rejoicing is about expressing one's own feelings, worship is about expression of praise to God. So what's our reaction? when we see and experience Christ in our midst, do we stop simply at joy? or do we go on to worship? When we feel him near us, when we see the evidence that he is alive and at work all around us, when we hear the miracle stories, do we recognize our Lord? Do we rejoice in his presence? Or do we let it overflow in a life of praise?

In this time where worship no longer is something that happens in a church sanctuary, it has to be something that happens in our homes, and in our words and in our actions. Everything we do and say can be living worship of the living Lord, who is in and among us. But first, we have to see him, to recognize the ways he is in our midst. When Thomas wants to see the Lord, what Jesus shows him are his wounds. Thomas says "I want to see," and Jesus shows him, not only his face, but his scarred hands, feet and side. These are what Thomas wants to see and touch. These are the proof of the presence of the risen Lord.

In these days of waiting, and wishing, we may find ourselves yearning to see the Lord. To see some sign to prove that he has not left us orphaned, some sign that he is present, as he promised, in these times when we need to see him the most. But we need to ask ourselves, What do we want to see? Do we just want to see his smiling face? Or are we willing also to see and feel his wounds? If we, as disciples of the crucified and risen Lord, want to see Jesus he will show us his presence, and with it, he will show us his wounds.

That is Jesus' presence - not only his countenance, his embrace, but also his scarred hands, feet and side. We worship a suffering Christ, so it is precisely in suffering that we will see the Lord. Where hands are worn and weary from caring for the ill, there we will see the Lord. Where feet are aching from laboring to provide for the hungry, there we will see the Lord. Where hearts are breaking over loss and grief, there we will see the Lord. The presence of the Resurrected Jesus is there, in the compassion for the sick and suffering, in the empathy for the poor and needy, in the tears shed with the afraid and grieving. There, in the bound and broken bodies of his children are the heart, hands, and feet of Jesus.

Although history has labeled him the Doubter, our call is to be like Thomas. Not to be satisfied until we too have seen the Lord until we too overflow with worship and praise in his presence - And not to stop looking until we see the wounds of Christ because it is there, in the suffering...through the tears... in the waiting and yearning and grieving, that the body of Christ is present - in us - and in all who respond out of love.

Jesus' presence may not be apparent to us at first. We may have to wait. But perhaps the waiting will make us more ready to worship, may make our tongues more willing to praise him, may make us realize that Jesus is not just the beatific face we see painted in portraits...but that it is his scars that make the proof of his life real... and, if we're honest, that make it much more like our own.