

April 11, 2021
Rev. Kerry Smith

John 20:19-30 Catch Your Breath in Times of Fear
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 20:19-30

New Revised Standard Version

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.

In response to Mary Magdalene's proclamation of the risen Jesus, of abundant life, of a world forever changed and open with possibility, they hide in fear behind locked doors.¹ Jesus meets the disciples where they are huddled in darkness, and Jesus offers them peace in place of fear. Jesus shows them his hands and his side, and they know it's Jesus.

Thomas must see it to believe it. He has conditions to his faith. Thomas wants hard evidence, unquestionable eyewitness fact that Jesus is risen. We all want a solid sign in those moments of crisis in our lives. So, eight days later, Jesus appears and speaks directly to Thomas. We don't know if Thomas followed through on his conditions, the only thing we know is that he says, "My Lord and my God." Seeing the Risen Christ made Thomas confess him as Lord and God.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." That's you and me!

Come and see, that's how it works with Jesus. One person has an experience with Jesus, then they tell someone else, then shares about Jesus with the next person.

Easter morning starts with Mary Magdalene. She encounters Jesus, shares the news, and the others don't buy it until they have their own experiences. Thomas has his own experience and then he believes more fully. We have to have our own experience of Jesus, too. Thomas has shared his experience with us, now what will we do?

John's Gospel is all about living abundantly. How can Thomas' experience help us to live more abundantly? This story for me is one of fear. There are many things that keep us locked in fear. Finances, broken relationships, addictions, the unknown, our past, the list can go on and on. We all have fears. Fear is a natural response to fight or flight. Fear is a gift that keeps us alive and offers strength in moments that are truly dangerous for us. Fear benefits us, but it can become unhealthy and turn into anxiety. Fear can keep us locked away from our authentic selves, from one another, and from God. Christ wants to step right into the heart of our fears and breathe peace into us. Christ is offering us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that even when we are locked in the room of our fears, Jesus breathes new life into us!

¹ I am thankful for Jamie Clark Soles book, *Reading John for Dear Life* for her insights about this passage.

I want to invite us to practice mindfulness this week. To be mindful of those moments when we feel fear. To be aware of what it feels like, where it is located in our bodies, what it does to our thoughts. Then, aware of our fears, take in three deep breaths. With each inhale hear Christ say to you, "Peace be with you". With each exhale imagine Christ removing your fears. May it be so this day and all days, Amen.